BIRTHDAY OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

The American Calendar

Amy A. Kass | Leon R. Kass

THE MEANING OF MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY

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Table of Contents

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1.
Martin Luther King Jr. Day:
An American Holiday

1

Martin Luther King Jr. Day: An American Holiday

The Origins and Traditions of Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Fifteen years after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, the third Monday in January became a national holiday to honor the birthday of the slain civil rights leader. A Baptist minister and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, King advocated nonviolence while leading the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s and 1960s and famously articulated a vision of America wherein every citizen truly had equal rights. Although King championed nonviolence, his life was tragically cut short on April 4, 1968 when he was shot and killed before a demonstration in Memphis, Tennessee.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day is the only federal holiday that honors a private American citizen, and, with the celebration of George Washington's Birthday and Columbus Day, one of just three holidays honoring a specific person. Calls for a holiday to honor King began immediately following his death. A 15-year effort on the part of lawmakers and civil rights leaders, buoyed by popular support, culminated in 1983 when the US Congress passed legislation that officially designated the third Monday in January as a federal holiday. However, controversy continued to surround the day, and it was not until 2000 that every state celebrated a holiday in honor of King. Today, Americans use this anniversary not only to pay tribute to one man's efforts in the cause of equal rights, but also to celebrate the Civil Rights Movement as a whole (see next selection).

Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia on January 15, 1929, the second of three children to Reverend Martin Luther King Sr. and his wife Alberta. Growing up, King Jr. attended Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, where his grandfather and father served as pastors. He graduated from a segregated high school at 15 and entered Morehouse College in 1945. Though initially uncertain about whether he wanted to enter the ministry, King chose to follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather and was ordained during his senior year of college. He then continued his studies at the Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, where he was elected class president of the majority-white student body and graduated with distinction in 1951. While a doctoral student in systematic theology at Boston University, King met Coretta Scott, a music student originally from Alabama. The coupled married in 1953 and had four children over the next decade: Yolanda, Martin Luther III, Dexter, and Bernice.

As a graduate student, King developed and refined the personal beliefs that would guide his leadership of the Civil Rights Movement. The doctrine of the Social Gospel, a liberal movement within American Protestantism that applied Christian ethics to social problems, became a guiding force in the young minister's theology. King's familial church, Ebenezer Baptist, emphasized social activism, public service, and charity, and his doctoral studies reinforced these teachings. In a 1952 letter to Coretta, King reaffirmed his belief in the Social Gospel, writing that he would "hope, work, and pray that in the future we will live to see a warless world, a better distribution of wealth, and a

brotherhood that transcends race or color. This is the gospel that I will preach to the world."[1]

It was also while studying theology that King first encountered the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, whose advocacy of nonviolence deeply resonated with him. The Indian independence leader's success in using nonviolent civil disobedience led King to hope that the same tactics could work for African Americans in the United States. King believed that nonviolent civil disobedience "breaks with any philosophy or system which argues that the ends justify the means. It recognizes that the end is pre-existent in the means." Moreover, King argued that nonviolence prevents "discontent from degenerating into moral bitterness and hatred," which "is as harmful to the hater as it is to the hated."[2] While the Social Gospel provided the moral imperative for participation in the Civil Rights Movement, Gandhi's example provided the practical model for King to combat racism and disenfranchisement.

Civil Rights Leader

In 1954, King moved to Montgomery, Alabama to become the minister of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, and his commitment to nonviolence faced its first test the following year during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. A protest against the city's segregated public buses began when a young African American activist named Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give her seat to a white passenger. Parks' act of civil disobedience launched the 381-day boycott of public transport, which ended when the US Supreme Court declared the city's segregationist laws unconstitutional. During the strike, King was attacked, jailed, and threatened, but remained committed to the principles of nonviolence. The Montgomery Bus Boycott proved a major victory for King's strategy of nonviolent resistance and brought the young minister into the national spotlight.

Three years later, King helped to found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to coordinate nonviolent civil rights activism. In 1963, King led major demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama to combat segregation and unfair hiring practices. Jailed during the protests, King responded to a group of Alabama clergymen opposed to the public demonstrations in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," by emphasizing the values of cooperation and empathy. He argued that all Americans benefit from creating a more equal society, writing, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."[3] That same year, King led the March on Washington, where he delivered his celebrated "I Have a Dream" speech. A year later, King became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

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[1] The King Encyclopedia, "Social Gospel," http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/about_king/encyclopedia/social_gospel.html.

[2] Martin Luther King Jr., "Address to the 53rd NAACP Convention," Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia, July 5, 1962, The King Center: Digital Archives, www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/mlk-address-naacp-53rd-convention.

[3] Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," May 1, 1963, The King Center: Digital Archives, www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/letter-birmingham-city-jail-0. See full text, below.

Though King continued to fight racial inequality and injustice, his vocal opposition to the Vietnam War in the late 1960s left him estranged from former supporters. On April 4, 1968, King traveled to Memphis to support a strike of local sanitation workers. While standing on the balcony of his hotel, King, then age 39, was shot and killed.

A National Holiday

The effort to commemorate Martin Luther King Jr. with a national holiday began immediately after his death. Congressman John Conyers (D-MI) introduced a bill in the House of Representatives to create a national holiday in honor of King's birthday just four days after his assassination. The Reverend Ralph Abernathy, King's successor as head of the SCLC, argued that such a holiday would not only pay tribute to King himself, but would also honor the achievements of black Americans more broadly: "At no other time during the year does this Nation pause to pay respect to the life and work of a black man."[4] Others argued that such a holiday would signal the support of Americans of all races both for King's work in particular and for the Civil Rights Movement in general.

Though Conyers' bill was unsuccessful, King's birthday became an important holiday in communities across the country. Many public schools and local governments nationwide closed on the day, and civic groups and institutions celebrated the day with vigils, marches, and speeches. In 1973, Illinois became the first state to create a holiday in observance of King's birthday, and a number of states soon passed similar legislation. Coretta Scott King founded the King Center in Atlanta in 1968 to continue the work of her late husband, and the organization became a prominent advocate for establishing a national holiday during the 1970s.

Conyers reintroduced legislation in Congress in 1979 for a federal King holiday, and though it garnered more support, the bill still fell five votes short of passing. Opponents raised several arguments against the proposal. Many cited fiscal concerns, arguing that adding another paid government holiday to the calendar was an unnecessary public expense. Others questioned whether King, who never held a public office or served in the military, warranted a public holiday alongside George Washington, the only other American celebrated with a holiday, at the exclusion of other leaders such as Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson. Finally, some congressional objections to the proposal centered on King's criticism of the Vietnam War and his alleged ties to communism.

Despite these reservations, the proposed holiday continued to gain popular support, and the SCLC coordinated a widespread campaign to win congressional votes. In 1981, singer Stevie Wonder released the single, "Happy Birthday," to draw attention to the cause, and a petition with over six million signatures in support of a King holiday arrived in Washington.[5] Finally, after a hard-fought battle in the Senate, Congress in 1983 passed a bill establishing the third Monday in January as a federal holiday, with its celebration to

[4] "King Holiday Plea Pressed By Abernathy," *The Washington Post*, January, 13, 1969, A18.
[5] To watch Stevie Wonder perform the song, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=inS9gAgSENE, and read the text of the lyrics below.

begin in 1986.[6] After signing the bill into law, President Ronald Reagan remarked, "Each year on Martin Luther King Day, let us not only recall Dr. King, but rededicate ourselves to the Commandments he believed in and sought to live every day: Thou shall love thy God with all thy heart, and thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself."[7] At the same ceremony, Coretta Scott King declared, "This is not a black holiday; it is a people's holiday."[8]

Even after it was recognized by the federal government, the holiday remained contested. The decision over whether or not to celebrate the holiday still fell to each state, and the 23 states that had not already established holidays in honor of King before 1986 could decide whether or not to mark the day. In the year 2000, South Carolina became the last state to recognize Martin Luther King Jr. Day, 17 years after it became a federal holiday. Today, many Americans view the holiday as a time to honor the legacy of King through community service, in keeping with the emphasis introduced by the King Holiday and Service Act that Congress passed in 1994. The King Center notes that, "Martin Luther King Jr. Day is not only for celebration and remembrance, education and tribute, but above all a day of service."

In 2011, a monument to King was unveiled on the National Mall in Washington, DC, another tribute to the important legacy of the civil rights leader. President Barack Obama emphasized King's legacy of cooperation and service for the greater good: "We need more than ever to take heed of Dr. King's teachings. He calls on us to stand in the other person's shoes; to see through their eyes; to understand their pain. . . . He also understood that to bring about true and lasting change, there must be the possibility of reconciliation; that any social movement has to channel this tension through the spirit of love and mutuality."[9]

[6] According to the passed bill, "the amendment […] shall take effect on the first January 1 that occurs after the two-year period following the date of the enactment of this Act."

[7] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks on Signing the Bill Making the Birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. a National Holiday," November 2, 1983, Washington, DC, The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/110283a.htm. For full text, see below.

[8] Frances Romero, "A Brief History of Martin Luther King Jr. Day," *Time*, January 18, 2010, www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1872501,00.html.

[9] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Dedication," October 16, 2011, Washington, DC, www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/10/16/remarks-president-martin-luther-king-jr-memorial-dedication. For full text, see selection below.

A Brief History of the Civil Rights Movement

Although the third Monday in January commemorates the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr., the holiday also celebrates the broader Civil Rights Movement and the many individuals who helped combat the discriminatory social and legal system that, until the late twentieth century, denied African American citizens their equal rights.

Early History

Although we generally focus on the Civil Rights Movement that began in the 1950s and 1960s, the African American struggle for liberty and equality began much earlier, well before the Civil War. The system of chattel slavery that took hold in the Americas within a year of Christopher Columbus's landing perpetually enslaved Africans, deprived them of basic human rights, and created an entrenched racial hierarchy. Throughout the colonial and antebellum eras, enslaved Africans defied this dehumanizing and violent system, often through acts of passive resistance that lessened the profits of slave-owners. But there were also overt acts of resistance, such as the slave revolts of 1822 led by Denmark Vesey (c.1767–1822) and of 1831 led by Nat Turner (1800–31). The Underground Railroad, a network of black and white antislavery advocates, helped slaves escape and travel to free states in the North. Whether remembered by name or not, enslaved and free African Americans asserted their dignity through acts of passive and explicit defiance and the formation of strong, independent communities.

One of the most famous spokesmen for the abolition of slavery and equal rights for African Americans was Frederick Douglass (1818–95). Born as a slave in Maryland, Douglass taught himself to read and write, and as a young man, escaped his abusive master and settled in the North. Douglass soon became involved in the abolitionist movement and after meeting William Lloyd Garrison (1805–79), became an antislavery lecturer and contributor to abolitionist newspapers. Some white critics doubted Douglass's account of his enslavement and escape, not believing that a self-taught, former slave could be so eloquent. In response to these skeptics, Douglass wrote an autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) which remains one of the most powerful and moving works about the evils of slavery and the reality of life for black Americans in the nineteenth century. (Douglass would go on to write two more autobiographies: *My Bondage and My Freedom* [1855] and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* [1881].)

The advocacy of abolitionists like Douglass and Garrison contributed to the end of slavery during and following the Civil War. Together, the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), as well as the Thirteenth (1865), Fourteenth (1868), and Fifteenth (1870) Amendments to the Constitution abolished slavery and declared that American citizenship and the right to vote could not be restricted on the basis of race.

In spite of the abolition of slavery and these constitutional changes, widespread discrimination and segregation persisted. Known as Jim Crow, this system of state and local laws, particularly in the former slave states of the American South, widely denied

African Americans the right to vote, prevented them from accessing education and employment opportunities, and restricted the use of public facilities and transportation on the basis of race. African Americans still lacked the rights of citizenship afforded to white Americans and lived in highly segregated, underserved communities.

During the early twentieth century, African American leaders responded in different ways to the continuing legal entrenchment of racial hierarchy through the Jim Crow system. Booker T. Washington (1856–1915) was the most well-known African American thinker and educator in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Washington was a member of the last generation of enslaved African Americans, born in Virginia ten years before the conclusion of the Civil War. Aware of the social and political realities of the Jim Crow South, Washington sought to promote racial progress apolitically, via black self-improvement obtained through education and the habits of self-command, avoiding actively antagonizing white leaders.

Washington's philosophy, often called by others "racial accommodation" because it sought to elevate African Americans within existing segregated arrangements, increasingly drew criticism in the early twentieth century. Other African American leaders, particularly W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), voiced criticism of Washington's apolitical approach and his willingness to accept white hegemony. The first African American to earn a Ph.D. at Harvard University, Du Bois demanded that black and white citizens be afforded equal rights and sought to combat the racist system on which disenfranchisement rested. Du Bois helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which became the most influential and powerful African American advocacy group during the early twentieth century, and he remained the editor of its newspaper, *The Crisis*.[10]

The Civil Rights Movement

With the founding of the NAACP in 1909, a more formal struggle for civil rights that coordinated political, social, and legal resistance to Jim Crow began. The NAACP advocated for the right of African Americans to serve in the US military during World War I and began to coordinate and fund legal challenges to Jim Crow laws. Between the First and Second World Wars, the NAACP challenged laws across the country that denied African Americans their full rights of citizenship and sought federal legislation to protect against lynching, establishing the Legal Defense Fund in 1939 for this express purpose.

The three decades following World War II, often known as the Civil Rights Era, witnessed dramatic changes in American political and social culture. In addition to the NAACP, numerous other groups emerged to fight for equal rights for African Americans.

[10] For more on Douglass, Washington, and Du Bois, see the following selections in your copy of *What So Proudly We Hail*: Frederick Douglass, "The Last Flogging" (240) and "Why Should a Colored Man Enlist?" (511); Booker T. Washington, "Democracy and Education" (516); and W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth" (525). See also selections by Douglass ("The Civil Rights Case") and Du Bois ("On Being Crazy" and "Of the Coming of John") below.

Their efforts, along with the bravery and dedication of countless individuals, helped strike down laws that enforced segregation and discrimination, and inspired the passage of new legislation that afforded greater protection to African American citizens.

Exploiting the hypocrisy of asking African Americans to give their lives in the service of their county while segregating their units, the Legal Defense Fund secured the desegregation of the Armed Services in 1948. Their success in desegregating public spaces and services continued in the landmark Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, argued by Thurgood Marshall, who would later become the first African American Supreme Court Justice. The court ruled that the guiding principle of segregation—separate but equal—was unconstitutional, and it ordered the integration of schools across the country.[11]

The court's decision was enforced, and schools were integrated despite local resistance across the South. In 1957, the Governor of Arkansas Orval Faubus (1910–54) ordered the National Guard to bar nine black students from attending the formerly all-white Central High School in Little Rock, in defiance of the Supreme Court's ruling. In response, President Dwight D. Eisenhower deployed federal troops to accompany the students and enforce integration.[12] In the early 1960s, there were several more instances of conflict when black students trying to enter formerly white universities faced armed opposition and required the protection of federal troops.

Other African American individuals and groups used nonviolent protests and civil disobedience to fight discrimination. On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a black seamstress and secretary of the local chapter of the NAACP, refused to give up her seat for a white man on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and was arrested, tried, and fined. Parks' act inspired the Montgomery Bus Boycott, during which tens of thousands of black residents refused to use the bus system in Montgomery. The protest lasted for 381 days, until the Supreme Court ruled that the segregation of public transit systems was unconstitutional.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott inspired similar acts of collective civil disobedience to challenge discriminatory local laws. Four black students in Greensboro, North Carolina staged a sit-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter that only served whites. Their protest soon gained the support of hundreds of other students, both black and white, in Greensboro, and it sparked similar protests against segregated restaurants and commercial spaces. Widespread news coverage and the economic toll of the demonstrations forced businesses across the South to begin integrating in the summer of 1960.

Encouraged by the success of the sit-ins, students founded the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which organized student nonviolent protests against discrimination and segregation. SNCC, along with the Congress of Racial Equality

[11] See the text of Chief Justice Earl Warren's opinion in Brown below.
[12] The text of President Eisenhower's speech to the nation explaining his action appears as a later selection in this chapter. To watch the videotape of his speech, see http://whitehouse.c-span.org/Video/SignificantEvents/WHSE23.aspx.

(CORE), initiated "Freedom Rides," in which black and white activists rode buses through the South to test the 1960 Supreme Court ruling that interstate transport could not be segregated. Their efforts faced violent opposition; many of the students were attacked, beaten, and jailed.

Outside volunteers were far from the only victims of racial violence. In one of the most horrific acts of brutality, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, a common meeting place for local civil rights leaders, was bombed on September 15, 1963. The explosion early on a Sunday morning killed four young girls—Addie Mae Collins (age 14), Denise McNair (age 11), Carole Robertson (age 14), and Cynthia Wesley (age 14)—and injured many others.[13]

In addition to desegregation, voter registration became an important goal for the Civil Rights Movement. Across the South, African Americans largely remained disenfranchised through poll taxes, literacy tests, and other onerous requirements intended to prevent them from voting. In 1961, several national civil rights organizations began coordinating with African American community leaders to begin registering black voters. The united efforts of the NAACP, SNCC, CORE, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) intensified in the summer of 1964, known as the Mississippi Freedom Summer, during which student volunteers, most of whom were white, registered black voters across Mississippi. Their efforts encountered fierce and often violent opposition from local whites and resulted in the deaths of at least three volunteers, as well as social and economic repercussions for African Americans who tried to register to vote.

Movement organizers also used widely publicized marches to draw national attention to the political and social inequalities faced by African Americans and to increase public support for the Movement's efforts. The famous March on Washington in August of 1963 attracted more than 200,000 protesters, who gathered at the Lincoln Memorial to hear Martin Luther King Jr. deliver his "I Have a Dream" speech. King also helped to organize another important march two years later, the 1965 March from Selma to Montgomery, which called for equal voting rights.[14] Media coverage of the campaigns and public outrage over racial violence strengthened national support for the Civil Rights Movement and put pressure on the federal government to offer greater protection for the rights of black citizens.

In response, Congress passed two landmark pieces of legislation: the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965). First proposed by President John F. Kennedy and signed into law after his death by President Lyndon B. Johnson, the Civil Rights Act broadly prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, or national origin and invalidated any state or local laws that had previously enforced discriminatory practices. The Voting Rights Act disallowed the numerous restrictions on voting rights that localities had used to exclude African Americans from the franchise. Together, these

[13] The eulogy for the martyred children delivered by King appears later in this anthology.

[14] A photograph of the marchers adorns the cover of this volume. For more information on the march and the photo, see "About the Cover," below.

pieces of legislation solidified the efforts of grassroots organizations and individuals who fought to end segregation, disenfranchisement, and segregation.[15]

With the political rights of blacks protected by federal law, African American leaders began to shift their focus to other social and economic issues, such as increasing employment and housing opportunities. Many black communities, especially those outside the South, remained angered by persistent social and economic inequality, a feeling perhaps most clearly expressed in the Watts Riots, which broke out in Los Angeles in 1965. Six days of rioting injured more than a thousand people and resulted in several thousand arrests. King became a vocal opponent of the continuing social and economic inequality, and following his assassination in 1968, riots again broke out in cities across the country. In response, Congress passed the final major piece of civil rights legislation, the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Commonly known as the Fair Housing Act, this law offered greater protection against discrimination for Americans of all races, genders, nationalities, and religions in their efforts to rent, own, and finance their homes.

The Rise of Black Power

Even before King's death, dissatisfaction and frustration over persistent social and economic inequalities led to factions within the Civil Rights Movement. The most influential figure for a more militant brand of black activism was Malcolm X (born Malcolm Little; 1925–65). Little converted to the Nation of Islam, a religious group that inflected Islam with teachings of black supremacy, and took the surname "X" to signify that while he would never know his true African ancestry, he had "replaced the white slavemaster name of 'Little.'" Malcolm X rose quickly through the ranks of the Nation of Islam and became one of the group's most vocal and visible spokesmen in the late 1950s and early 1960s, advocating the separation of black communities from mainstream white society.

In March 1964, Malcolm X announced his break with the Nation of Islam. After returning from a pilgrimage to Mecca, he adopted radically different ideas. He began practicing Sunni Islam, and came to see the faith as a religion of racial unity and equality. Malcolm X was assassinated by members of the Nation of Islam in 1965, but his posthumous autobiography became extremely influential.

Other black leaders began to question the Movement's commitment to nonviolence and its goal of integration and found a new direction in the ideology of "Black Power" expressed by Malcolm X. Stokely Carmichael (1941–98), who became head of the SNCC in 1966, challenged the philosophy of nonviolence by responding to white violence with an equal show of force, and argued that blacks should focus on economic and cultural independence rather than integration into white society. Another group influenced by the teachings of Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party, formed in Oakland, California in 1966 by Huey Newton (1942–89) and Bobby Seale (b. 1937), espoused more militant views

[15] The Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act can be found at www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=97 and www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=100, respectively.

and advocated Black Nationalism, a belief in establishing the independence of African American communities to combat the economic plight and racism they faced. Although the Black Power movement eventually became publicly quiescent, the ideas and example of Malcolm X still command considerable attention in African American communities and on college campuses.

Conclusion

The establishment of the national holiday in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1983 reflects the struggles of many individuals to achieve equal rights for African Americans. The holiday has become a symbol of a movement that is much larger than one leader and includes the work of generations of Americans. By setting aside the third Monday in January, we not only honor the memory of King, but also pay tribute to the Americans who resisted slavery, battled Jim Crow and racism, and struggled to secure equal rights for all Americans.

On the Situation in Little Rock: A Radio and Television Address to the American People

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

In September 1957, nine black students attempted to enroll in the previously all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, under the terms of an approved desegregation plan following the Supreme Court's 1954 and 1955 decisions declaring racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional and ordering their desegregation with all deliberate speed. Arkansas governor Orval Faubus first called out the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the students from entering the school, and later reneged on a promise to President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969) that he would thereafter keep the Guard at the school to maintain order so that the students might peacefully enroll. But with the National Guard withdrawn, a large riot broke out when the nine students entered the school, and the mayor of Little Rock called upon President Eisenhower to intervene. Eisenhower faced an extremely difficult decision: he felt obliged to uphold federal law, but he also worried about interfering with state and local law enforcement and especially about causing bloody violence on the streets of Little Rock, with the federal government attacking its own citizens. Yet he boldly chose to place the Arkansas National Guard under federal authority and sent in 1,000 US Army paratroopers to assist the Guard in maintaining order. His risky venture succeeded, and the students enrolled without further trouble. This is the text of the speech that he gave to the nation to explain his decision.[16]

It is difficult today, when the federal government is intimately involved in so much of our lives, to appreciate the unprecedented character of President Eisenhower's decision to send federal troops into one of the states. How does he justify his action? How does he appeal for the listeners' sympathy and support? What legitimate constitutional power is Eisenhower claiming to exercise? What do you think of his argument regarding the duty to obey the law, regardless of whether one agrees with it? Why does Eisenhower not make an argument about whether the desegregation decision was right and good? At the very end of the speech Eisenhower speaks about "liberty and justice for all": what is the connection between obeying the law—whatever we think about its rightness—and liberty and justice?

Good Evening, My Fellow Citizens:

For a few minutes this evening I want to speak to you about the serious situation that has arisen in Little Rock. To make this talk I have come to the President's office in the White House. I could have spoken from Rhode Island, where I have been staying recently, but I felt that, in speaking from the house of Lincoln, of Jackson and of Wilson, my words would better convey both the sadness I feel in the action I was compelled today

[16] *For a videotape of the broadcast, see: http://whitehouse.c-span.org/Video/SignificantEvents/WHSE23.aspx.*

to take and the firmness with which I intend to pursue this course until the orders of the Federal Court at Little Rock can be executed without unlawful interference.

In that city, under the leadership of demagogic extremists, disorderly mobs have deliberately prevented the carrying out of proper orders from a Federal Court. Local authorities have not eliminated that violent opposition and, under the law, I yesterday issued a Proclamation calling upon the mob to disperse.

This morning the mob again gathered in front of the Central High School of Little Rock, obviously for the purpose of again preventing the carrying out of the Court's order relating to the admission of Negro children to that school.

Whenever normal agencies prove inadequate to the task and it becomes necessary for the Executive Branch of the Federal Government to use its powers and authority to uphold Federal Courts, the President's responsibility is inescapable.

In accordance with that responsibility, I have today issued an Executive Order directing the use of troops under Federal authority to aid in the execution of Federal law at Little Rock, Arkansas. This became necessary when my Proclamation of yesterday was not observed, and the obstruction of justice still continues.

It is important that the reasons for my action be understood by all our citizens.

As you know, the Supreme Court of the United States has decided that separate public educational facilities for the races are inherently unequal and therefore compulsory school segregation laws are unconstitutional.

Our personal opinions about the decision have no bearing on the matter of enforcement; the responsibility and authority of the Supreme Court to interpret the Constitution are very clear. Local Federal Courts were instructed by the Supreme Court to issue such orders and decrees as might be necessary to achieve admission to public schools without regard to race—and with all deliberate speed.

During the past several years, many communities in our Southern States have instituted public school plans for gradual progress in the enrollment and attendance of school children of all races in order to bring themselves into compliance with the law of the land.

They thus demonstrated to the world that we are a nation in which laws, not men, are supreme.

I regret to say that this truth—the cornerstone of our liberties—was not observed in this instance.

It was my hope that this localized situation would be brought under control by city and state authorities. If the use of local police powers had been sufficient, our traditional

method of leaving the problems in those hands would have been pursued. But when large gatherings of obstructionists made it impossible for the decrees of the Court to be carried out, both the law and the national interest demanded that the President take action.

Here is the sequence of events in the development of the Little Rock school case.

In May of 1955, the Little Rock School Board approved a moderate plan for the gradual desegregation of the public schools in that city. It provided that a start toward integration would be made at the present term in the high school, and that the plan would be in full operation by 1963. Here I might say that in a number of communities in Arkansas integration in the schools has already started and without violence of any kind. Now this Little Rock plan was challenged in the courts by some who believed that the period of time as proposed in the plan was too long.

The United States Court at Little Rock, which has supervisory responsibility under the law for the plan of desegregation in the public schools, dismissed the challenge, thus approving a gradual rather than an abrupt change from the existing system. The court found that the school board had acted in good faith in planning for a public school system free from racial discrimination.

Since that time, the court has on three separate occasions issued orders directing that the plan be carried out. All persons were instructed to refrain from interfering with the efforts of the school board to comply with the law.

Proper and sensible observance of the law then demanded the respectful obedience which the nation has a right to expect from all its people. This, unfortunately, has not been the case at Little Rock. Certain misguided persons, many of them imported into Little Rock by agitators, have insisted upon defying the law and have sought to bring it into disrepute. The orders of the court have thus been frustrated.

The very basis of our individual rights and freedoms rests upon the certainty that the President and the Executive Branch of Government will support and insure the carrying out of the decisions of the Federal Courts, even, when necessary with all the means at the President's command.

Unless the President did so, anarchy would result.

There would be no security for any except that which each one of us could provide for himself.

The interest of the nation in the proper fulfillment of the law's requirements cannot yield to opposition and demonstrations by some few persons.

Mob rule cannot be allowed to override the decisions of our courts.

Now, let me make it very clear that Federal troops are not being used to relieve local and state authorities of their primary duty to preserve the peace and order of the community. Nor are the troops there for the purpose of taking over the responsibility of the School Board and the other responsible local officials in running Central High School. The running of our school system and the maintenance of peace and order in each of our States are strictly local affairs and the Federal Government does not interfere except in a very few special cases and when requested by one of the several States. In the present case the troops are there, pursuant to law, solely for the purpose of preventing interference with the orders of the Court.

The proper use of the powers of the Executive Branch to enforce the orders of a Federal Court is limited to extraordinary and compelling circumstances. Manifestly, such an extreme situation has been created in Little Rock. This challenge must be met and with such measures as will preserve to the people as a whole their lawfully-protected rights in a climate permitting their free and fair exercise.

The overwhelming majority of our people in every section of the country are united in their respect for observance of the law—even in those cases where they may disagree with that law.

They deplore the call of extremists to violence.

The decision of the Supreme Court concerning school integration, of course, affects the South more seriously than it does other sections of the country. In that region I have many warm friends, some of them in the city of Little Rock. I have deemed it a great personal privilege to spend in our Southland tours of duty while in the military service and enjoyable recreational periods since that time.

So from intimate personal knowledge, I know that the overwhelming majority of the people in the South—including those of Arkansas and of Little Rock—are of good will, united in their efforts to preserve and respect the law even when they disagree with it.

They do not sympathize with mob rule. They, like the rest of our nation, have proved in two great wars their readiness to sacrifice for America.

A foundation of our American way of life is our national respect for law.

In the South, as elsewhere, citizens are keenly aware of the tremendous disservice that has been done to the people of Arkansas in the eyes of the nation, and that has been done to the nation in the eyes of the world.

At a time when we face grave situations abroad because of the hatred that Communism bears toward a system of government based on human rights, it would be difficult to exaggerate the harm that is being done to the prestige and influence, and indeed to the safety, of our nation and the world.

Our enemies are gloating over this incident and using it everywhere to misrepresent our whole nation. We are portrayed as a violator of those standards of conduct which the peoples of the world united to proclaim in the Charter of the United Nations. There they affirmed "faith in fundamental human rights" and "in the dignity and worth of the human person" and they did so "without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion."

And so, with deep confidence, I call upon the citizens of the State of Arkansas to assist in bringing to an immediate end all interference with the law and its processes. If resistance to the Federal Court orders ceases at once, the further presence of Federal troops will be unnecessary and the City of Little Rock will return to its normal habits of peace and order and a blot upon the fair name and high honor of our nation in the world will be removed.

Thus will be restored the image of America and of all its parts as one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Good night, and thank you very much.

To Fulfill These Rights:
Commencement Address at Howard University

LYNDON B. JOHNSON

As the Civil Rights Movement was gathering steam and gaining supporters, things were also changing in Washington, DC. In 1964, taking advantage of the nation's moral mood following the "Great March on Washington" in August 1963 and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy three months later, President Lyndon Baines Johnson (1908–73) helped push through the first Civil Rights Act in almost 90 years, outlawing discrimination on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, or sex in all public accommodations in the United States. The following year, Congress passed Johnson's Voting Rights Act that required every state to abolish all practices that would "deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color." On June 4, 1965, while the Voting Rights bill was still pending in the House of Representatives, Johnson delivered this commencement address at Howard University in Washington, DC. In it, Johnson sets forth a new national vision for fulfilling the promise of America for its Negro citizens. What is Johnson's vision? Why is freedom "not enough"? What does Johnson mean by "equality"? What would it take to achieve it? Might achieving it compromise freedom, at least for some? To what extent is this to be a task for the federal government? Can government welfare programs help to alleviate family breakdown, or might they unintentionally make matters worse?[17]

Dr. Nabrit, my fellow Americans:

I am delighted at the chance to speak at this important and this historic institution. Howard has long been an outstanding center for the education of Negro Americans. Its students are of every race and color and they come from many countries of the world. It is truly a working example of democratic excellence.

Our earth is the home of revolution. In every corner of every continent men charged with hope contend with ancient ways in the pursuit of justice. They reach for the newest of weapons to realize the oldest of dreams, that each may walk in freedom and pride, stretching his talents, enjoying the fruits of the earth.

Our enemies may occasionally seize the day of change, but it is the banner of our revolution they take. And our own future is linked to this process of swift and turbulent change in many lands in the world. But nothing in any country touches us more profoundly, and nothing is more freighted with meaning for our own destiny than the revolution of the Negro American.

In far too many ways American Negroes have been another nation: deprived of freedom, crippled by hatred, the doors of opportunity closed to hope.

[17] *For a video recording of the speech, see http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3387.*

In our time change has come to this Nation, too. The American Negro, acting with impressive restraint, has peacefully protested and marched, entered the courtrooms and the seats of government, demanding a justice that has long been denied. The voice of the Negro was the call to action. But it is a tribute to America that, once aroused, the courts and the Congress, the President and most of the people, have been the allies of progress.

Legal Protection for Human Rights

Thus we have seen the high court of the country declare that discrimination based on race was repugnant to the Constitution, and therefore void. We have seen in 1957, and 1960, and again in 1964, the first civil rights legislation in this Nation in almost an entire century.

As majority leader of the United States Senate, I helped to guide two of these bills through the Senate. And, as your President, I was proud to sign the third. And now very soon we will have the fourth—a new law guaranteeing every American the right to vote.

No act of my entire administration will give me greater satisfaction than the day when my signature makes this bill, too, the law of this land.

The voting rights bill will be the latest, and among the most important, in a long series of victories. But this victory—as Winston Churchill said of another triumph for freedom—"is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

That beginning is freedom; and the barriers to that freedom are tumbling down. Freedom is the right to share, share fully and equally, in American society—to vote, to hold a job, to enter a public place, to go to school. It is the right to be treated in every part of our national life as a person equal in dignity and promise to all others.

Freedom Is Not Enough

But freedom is not enough. You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please.

You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "you are free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.

Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates.

This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.

For the task is to give 20 million Negroes the same chance as every other American to learn and grow, to work and share in society, to develop their abilities—physical, mental and spiritual—and to pursue their individual happiness.

To this end equal opportunity is essential, but not enough, not enough. Men and women of all races are born with the same range of abilities. But ability is not just the product of birth. Ability is stretched or stunted by the family that you live with, and the neighborhood you live in—by the school you go to and the poverty or the richness of your surroundings. It is the product of a hundred unseen forces playing upon the little infant, the child, and finally the man.

Progress for Some

This graduating class at Howard University is witness to the indomitable determination of the Negro American to win his way in American life.

The number of Negroes in schools of higher learning has almost doubled in 15 years. The number of nonwhite professional workers has more than doubled in 10 years. The median income of Negro college women tonight exceeds that of white college women. And there are also the enormous accomplishments of distinguished individual Negroes—many of them graduates of this institution, and one of them the first lady ambassador in the history of the United States.[18]

These are proud and impressive achievements. But they tell only the story of a growing middle class minority, steadily narrowing the gap between them and their white counterparts.

A Widening Gulf

But for the great majority of Negro Americans—the poor, the unemployed, the uprooted, and the dispossessed—there is a much grimmer story. They still, as we meet here tonight, are another nation. Despite the court orders and the laws, despite the legislative victories and the speeches, for them the walls are rising and the gulf is widening.

Here are some of the facts of this American failure.

Thirty-five years ago the rate of unemployment for Negroes and whites was about the same. Tonight the Negro rate is twice as high.

In 1948 the 8 percent unemployment rate for Negro teenage boys was actually less than that of whites. By last year that rate had grown to 23 percent, as against 13 percent for whites unemployed.

[18] *Patricia Roberts Harris (1924–85) was the first African American woman to serve as a United States Ambassador, representing the US in Luxembourg under President Johnson, and the first to enter the line of succession to the Presidency. She graduated from Howard University in 1945.*

Between 1949 and 1959, the income of Negro men relative to white men declined in every section of this country. From 1952 to 1963 the median income of Negro families compared to white actually dropped from 57 percent to 53 percent.

In the years 1955 through 1957, 22 percent of experienced Negro workers were out of work at some time during the year. In 1961 through 1963 that proportion had soared to 29 percent.

Since 1947 the number of white families living in poverty has decreased 27 percent while the number of poorer nonwhite families decreased only 3 percent.

The infant mortality of nonwhites in 1940 was 70 percent greater than whites. Twenty-two years later it was 90 percent greater.

Moreover, the isolation of Negro from white communities is increasing, rather than decreasing as Negroes crowd into the central cities and become a city within a city.

Of course Negro Americans as well as white Americans have shared in our rising national abundance. But the harsh fact of the matter is that in the battle for true equality too many—far too many—are losing ground every day.

The Causes of Inequality

We are not completely sure why this is. We know the causes are complex and subtle. But we do know the two broad basic reasons. And we do know that we have to act.

First, Negroes are trapped—as many whites are trapped—in inherited, gateless poverty. They lack training and skills. They are shut in, in slums, without decent medical care. Private and public poverty combine to cripple their capacities.

We are trying to attack these evils through our poverty program, through our education program, through our medical care and our other health programs, and a dozen more of the Great Society programs that are aimed at the root causes of this poverty.

We will increase, and we will accelerate, and we will broaden this attack in years to come until this most enduring of foes finally yields to our unyielding will.

But there is a second cause—much more difficult to explain, more deeply grounded, more desperate in its force. It is the devastating heritage of long years of slavery; and a century of oppression, hatred, and injustice.

Special Nature of Negro Poverty

For Negro poverty is not white poverty. Many of its causes and many of its cures are the same. But there are differences—deep, corrosive, obstinate differences—radiating painful roots into the community, and into the family, and the nature of the individual.

These differences are not racial differences. They are solely and simply the consequence of ancient brutality, past injustice, and present prejudice. They are anguishing to observe. For the Negro they are a constant reminder of oppression. For the white they are a constant reminder of guilt. But they must be faced and they must be dealt with and they must be overcome, if we are ever to reach the time when the only difference between Negroes and whites is the color of their skin.

Nor can we find a complete answer in the experience of other American minorities. They made a valiant and a largely successful effort to emerge from poverty and prejudice.

The Negro, like these others, will have to rely mostly upon his own efforts. But he just can not do it alone. For they did not have the heritage of centuries to overcome, and they did not have a cultural tradition which had been twisted and battered by endless years of hatred and hopelessness, nor were they excluded—these others—because of race or color—a feeling whose dark intensity is matched by no other prejudice in our society.

Nor can these differences be understood as isolated infirmities. They are a seamless web. They cause each other. They result from each other. They reinforce each other.

Much of the Negro community is buried under a blanket of history and circumstance. It is not a lasting solution to lift just one corner of that blanket. We must stand on all sides and we must raise the entire cover if we are to liberate our fellow citizens.

The Roots of Injustice

One of the differences is the increased concentration of Negroes in our cities. More than 73 percent of all Negroes live in urban areas compared with less than 70 percent of the whites. Most of these Negroes live in slums. Most of these Negroes live together—a separated people.

Men are shaped by their world. When it is a world of decay, ringed by an invisible wall, when escape is arduous and uncertain, and the saving pressures of a more hopeful society are unknown, it can cripple the youth and it can desolate the men.

There is also the burden that a dark skin can add to the search for a productive place in our society. Unemployment strikes most swiftly and broadly at the Negro, and this burden erodes hope. Blighted hope breeds despair. Despair brings indifferences to the learning which offers a way out. And despair, coupled with indifferences, is often the source of destructive rebellion against the fabric of society.

There is also the lacerating hurt of early collision with white hatred or prejudice, distaste or condescension. Other groups have felt similar intolerance. But success and achievement could wipe it away. They do not change the color of a man's skin. I have seen this uncomprehending pain in the eyes of the little, young Mexican-American

schoolchildren that I taught many years ago. But it can be overcome. But, for many, the wounds are always open.

Family Breakdown

Perhaps most important—its influence radiating to every part of life—is the breakdown of the Negro family structure. For this, most of all, white America must accept responsibility. It flows from centuries of oppression and persecution of the Negro man. It flows from the long years of degradation and discrimination, which have attacked his dignity and assaulted his ability to produce for his family.

This, too, is not pleasant to look upon. But it must be faced by those whose serious intent is to improve the life of all Americans.

Only a minority—less than half—of all Negro children reach the age of 18 having lived all their lives with both of their parents. At this moment, tonight, little less than two-thirds are at home with both of their parents. Probably a majority of all Negro children receive federally-aided public assistance sometime during their childhood.

The family is the cornerstone of our society. More than any other force it shapes the attitude, the hopes, the ambitions, and the values of the child. And when the family collapses it is the children that are usually damaged. When it happens on a massive scale the community itself is crippled.

So, unless we work to strengthen the family, to create conditions under which most parents will stay together, all the rest—schools, and playgrounds, and public assistance, and private concern—will never be enough to cut completely the circle of despair and deprivation.

To Fulfill These Rights

There is no single easy answer to all of these problems.

Jobs are part of the answer. They bring the income which permits a man to provide for his family.

Decent homes in decent surroundings and a chance to learn—an equal chance to learn—are part of the answer.

Welfare and social programs better designed to hold families together are part of the answer.

Care for the sick is part of the answer.

An understanding heart by all Americans is another big part of the answer.

And to all of these fronts—and a dozen more—I will dedicate the expanding efforts of the Johnson administration.

But there are other answers that are still to be found. Nor do we fully understand even all of the problems. Therefore, I want to announce tonight that this fall I intend to call a White House conference of scholars, and experts, and outstanding Negro leaders—men of both races—and officials of Government at every level.

This White House conference's theme and title will be "To Fulfill These Rights."

Its object will be to help the American Negro fulfill the rights which, after the long time of injustice, he is finally about to secure.

To move beyond opportunity to achievement.

To shatter forever not only the barriers of law and public practice, but the walls which bound the condition of many by the color of his skin.

To dissolve, as best we can, the antique enmities of the heart which diminish the holder, divide the great democracy, and do wrong—great wrong—to the children of God.

And I pledge you tonight that this will be a chief goal of my administration, and of my program next year, and in the years to come. And I hope, and I pray, and I believe, it will be a part of the program of all America.

What Is Justice

For what is justice?

It is to fulfill the fair expectations of man.

Thus, American justice is a very special thing. For, from the first, this has been a land of towering expectations. It was to be a nation where each man could be ruled by the common consent of all—enshrined in law, given life by institutions, guided by men themselves subject to its rule. And all—all of every station and origin—would be touched equally in obligation and in liberty.

Beyond the law lay the land. It was a rich land, glowing with more abundant promise than man had ever seen. Here, unlike any place yet known, all were to share the harvest.

And beyond this was the dignity of man. Each could become whatever his qualities of mind and spirit would permit—to strive, to seek, and, if he could, to find his happiness.

This is American justice. We have pursued it faithfully to the edge of our imperfections, and we have failed to find it for the American Negro.

So, it is the glorious opportunity of this generation to end the one huge wrong of the American Nation and, in so doing, to find America for ourselves, with the same immense thrill of discovery which gripped those who first began to realize that here, at last, was a home for freedom.

All it will take is for all of us to understand what this country is and what this country must become.

The Scripture promises: "I shall light a candle of understanding in thine heart, which shall not be put out."

Together, and with millions more, we can light that candle of understanding in the heart of all America.

And, once lit, it will never again go out.

Happy Birthday

STEVIE WONDER

In 1981, the immensely talented and popular American singer and songwriter known on stage as Stevie Wonder (born in 1950 as Stevland Hardaway Judkins; he changed his surname to Morris) wrote and released this song in protest against the opposition to having a national holiday in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Its popularity here and abroad helped rally many supporters to the cause, and two years later Congress enacted the necessary legislation.

The song is of interest to us here because of the reasons Stevie Wonder adduces to honor King. Gathering evidence from each stanza, what are the reasons Wonder gives for why there should be a celebration of King's birthday? What, according to the song, is the special contribution for which King should be so honored? Do you think that these reasons add up to a defense of a specifically American holiday, rather than a universal human one? Do we—and should we—celebrate King as an apostle of peace and love, rather than, say, of freedom and equality?

To watch Stevie Wonder perform the song, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=inS9gAgSENE.

Read the lyrics here:
http://books.google.com/books?id=u9gDAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA1&pg=PA70#v=onepage&q&f=false.

Remarks on Signing the Bill Making the Birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. a National Holiday

RONALD REAGAN

On November 2, 1983, President Ronald Reagan (1911–2004) offered the following remarks on the occasion of his signing of the legislation that officially proclaimed the third Monday in January a federal holiday in honor of the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. For what particular things does President Reagan say we should honor King? Which do you think are most important? How, according to the speech, should we properly honor him? What is the connection between the biblical commandments (love of God and love of neighbor) and the American promise, "Let freedom ring"? What is meant by—and what do you think of—Mrs. King's suggestion that our national goal is to "create the love community"?[19]

Mrs. King, members of the King family, distinguished Members of the Congress, ladies and gentlemen, honored guests, I'm very pleased to welcome you to the White House, the home that belongs to all of us, the American people.

When I was thinking of the contributions to our country of the man that we're honoring today, a passage attributed to the American poet John Greenleaf Whittier comes to mind. "Each crisis brings its word and deed.'' In America, in the fifties and sixties, one of the important crises we faced was racial discrimination. The man whose words and deeds in that crisis stirred our nation to the very depths of its soul was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King was born in 1929 in an America where, because of the color of their skin, nearly 1 in 10 lived lives that were separate and unequal. Most black Americans were taught in segregated schools. Across the country, too many could find only poor jobs, toiling for low wages. They were refused entry into hotels and restaurants, made to use separate facilities. In a nation that proclaimed liberty and justice for all, too many black Americans were living with neither.

In one city, a rule required all blacks to sit in the rear of public buses. But in 1955, when a brave woman named Rosa Parks was told to move to the back of the bus, she said, "No.'' A young minister in a local Baptist church, Martin Luther King, then organized a boycott of the bus company—a boycott that stunned the country. Within 6 months the courts had ruled the segregation of public transportation unconstitutional.

Dr. King had awakened something strong and true, a sense that true justice must be colorblind, and that among white and black Americans, as he put it, "Their destiny is tied

[19] *To watch a recording of the address, see http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/5455.*

up with our destiny, and their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom; we cannot walk alone."

In the years after the bus boycott, Dr. King made equality of rights his life's work. Across the country, he organized boycotts, rallies, and marches. Often he was beaten, imprisoned, but he never stopped teaching nonviolence. "Work with the faith," he told his followers, "that unearned suffering is redemptive." In 1964 Dr. King became the youngest man in history to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Dr. King's work brought him to this city often. And in one sweltering August day in 1963, he addressed a quarter of a million people at the Lincoln Memorial. If American history grows from two centuries to twenty, his words that day will never be forgotten. "I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood."

In 1968 Martin Luther King was gunned down by a brutal assassin, his life cut short at the age of 39. But those 39 short years had changed America forever. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 had guaranteed all Americans equal use of public accommodations, equal access to programs financed by Federal funds, and the right to compete for employment on the sole basis of individual merit. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 had made certain that from then on black Americans would get to vote. But most important, there was not just a change of law; there was a change of heart. The conscience of America had been touched. Across the land, people had begun to treat each other not as blacks and whites, but as fellow Americans.

And since Dr. King's death, his father, the Reverend Martin Luther King Sr., and his wife, Coretta King, have eloquently and forcefully carried on his work. Also his family have joined in that cause.

Now our nation has decided to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., by setting aside a day each year to remember him and the just cause he stood for. We've made historic strides since Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of the bus. As a democratic people, we can take pride in the knowledge that we Americans recognized a grave injustice and took action to correct it. And we should remember that in far too many countries, people like Dr. King never have the opportunity to speak out at all.

But traces of bigotry still mar America. So, each year on Martin Luther King Day, let us not only recall Dr. King, but rededicate ourselves to the Commandments he believed in and sought to live every day: Thou shall love thy God with all thy heart, and thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. And I just have to believe that all of us—if all of us, young and old, Republicans and Democrats, do all we can to live up to those Commandments, then we will see the day when Dr. King's dream comes true, and in his words, "All of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning, '. . . land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.'"

Thank you, God bless you, and I will sign it.

Mrs. Coretta King, Dr. King's widow, offered the following response:

Thank you, Mr. President, Vice President Bush, Majority Leader Baker and the distinguished congressional and senatorial delegations, and other representatives who've gathered here, and friends.

All right-thinking people, all right-thinking Americans are joined in spirit with us this day as the highest recognition which this nation gives is bestowed upon Martin Luther King Jr., one who also was the recipient of the highest recognition which the world bestows, the Nobel Peace Prize.

In his own life's example, he symbolized what was right about America, what was noblest and best, what human beings have pursued since the beginning of history. He loved unconditionally. He was in constant pursuit of truth, and when he discovered it, he embraced it. His nonviolent campaigns brought about redemption, reconciliation, and justice. He taught us that only peaceful means can bring about peaceful ends, that our goal was to create the love community.

America is a more democratic nation, a more just nation, a more peaceful nation because Martin Luther King Jr. became her preeminent nonviolent commander.

Martin Luther King Jr. and his spirit live within all of us. Thank God for the blessing of his life and his leadership and his commitment. What manner of man was this? May we make ourselves worthy to carry on his dream and create the love community. Thank you.

Remarks on Signing the King Holiday and Service Act

WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON

The establishment of the national holiday in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. was followed by further deliberations about how best to honor King's memory. Accepting the recommendations of the King Holiday Commission, Congress passed the King Holiday and Service Act of 1994 (coauthored by Senator Harris Wofford of Pennsylvania and Congressman John Lewis of Georgia), which, among other things, encouraged the practice of community service on King's birthday holiday, and authorized the Corporation for National and Community Service to fund opportunities to do so. This selection contains the relevant excerpts from the signing speech made by President William Jefferson Clinton (b. 1946) on August 23, 1994.[20]

Compare the language of President Clinton with that of President Reagan (see previous selection), in describing King and his legacy. (Notice that the word "love" does not occur here.) How does President Clinton make the case for the relevance of community service to honoring King? To American citizenship? What is the purpose of community service, and for whose benefit is it undertaken? What does it mean for us "to serve"? Can its purposes be accomplished by "a day on," that is, by one day of service?

The King Holiday and Service Act of 1994 . . . combines for the very first time our national holiday in honor of Dr. King with a national day of service. Nothing could be more appropriate, for it was Dr. King who said everyone can be great because everyone can serve. I always think of the great line he said, that if a person was a street sweeper, he ought to sweep the streets as if he were Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel and try to be the best one in the whole world. That is what I think all of us ought to be about doing. Dr. King taught us that our faith can redeem us, that the sacrifices of individuals can sustain us, that moral courage can guide us. He dedicated himself to what was in his time and what remains the most difficult challenge we face as a democratic people: closing the great gap between our words and our deeds.

Now we are attempting in this bill and in this administration to accept this challenge for those who are still barred from the American dream and for those who worry that their children will have less of it than they had. We're doing our best here to give Government back to ordinary citizens, with an administration that is really more like America than any ever has been, not only in terms of its racial and gender diversity but also in its commitment to excellence, with 4 million new jobs, 20 million young people eligible for reduced college loans, 15 million working families getting tax cuts, and 3 years of reduction in our deficit for the first time since Mr. Truman was the President.

[20] *To watch President Clinton deliver the remarks, see www.c-spanvideo.org/program/JrHo.*

We demanded fairness in all public services and especially in housing, not only in Vidor, Texas,[21] but all across the United States. We fought to empower the next generation of our working people, beginning with Head Start and world-class educational standards, and apprenticeship programs for those who don't go to college, and more and less expensive college loans and national service for those who wish to pursue higher education. We fought to strengthen our communities with empowerment zones and community development banks. And we fought to make our people safer with the Brady bill and hopefully with this crime bill.

But we know and we learn here every day that laws alone cannot restore the American family, cannot give individuals the sense of self-worth and purpose, cannot make the American community what it ought to be. It takes the miracle that begins with personal choices and personal actions and that cuts through the fog of cynicism and negativism that grips every American from time to time and has often gripped this country too much.

Giving every citizen at the grassroots a chance to make a difference in his or her own life is a big part of what our efforts are all about. This law helps us to do that by linking the observance of Dr. King's birthday to a day of national service, an extraordinary idea and a timely one because just next month we will launch AmeriCorps in full-blown initiative, with 20,000 young people serving their communities at the grassroots level and earning some credit to further their education while doing so. Nothing could better serve the legacy of Dr. King. He was apathy's sworn enemy and action's tireless champion.

The King Commission has already sponsored seven national youth assemblies where young people address issues for themselves, such as drug abuse, illiteracy, and the importance of staying in school. The largest and most recent assembly took place in the capital of my home State, Little Rock, where Governor Tucker hosted 1,300 young people. Overall, the Commission has already helped to recruit 4 1/2 million young people to sign a pledge where they say no to violence and drugs and yes to serving in their communities. That is a truly revolutionary achievement.

With today's action we can broaden that effort. We can give many more an opportunity to make a difference, to respond to the needs of their communities, whether through tutoring children or housing the homeless, improving parks or keeping our people safer. As Senator Wofford has said in what I think is one of his best statements, "The King holiday should be a day on, not a day off."

Dr. King's time with us was too brief. But his vision was so great, his moral purpose was so strong that he made us believe that we could be better than we are and that someday we would be able to walk hand in hand together into a brighter tomorrow.

[21] *In January 1994, federal housing officials desegregated an all-white housing project in Vidor, a small East Texas town—the first time since the 1960s that such an armed escort had tried to enforce housing integration.*

He said, and I quote, "Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or the darkness of destructive selfishness. Life's most persistent and urgent question is what are you doing for others?"

Today we can say with some pride we have given all Americans a better chance to work together and to help others. This celebration of Dr. King will now be a celebration of his vision of community, his vision of service. And his life proves that it will work for all Americans and for our country.

Thank you very much.

Remarks at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Dedication

BARACK OBAMA

Since August 2011, the National Mall in Washington, DC contains a large monument in memory of Martin Luther King Jr., erected, according to the official vision statement, to "captur[e] the essence of his message, a message in which he so eloquently affirms the commanding tenets of the American Dream—Freedom, Democracy and Opportunity for All; a noble quest that gained him the Nobel Peace Prize and one that continues to influence people and societies throughout the world." The monument comprises The Stone of Hope, a massive thirty-foot relief statue of King, set between two pieces of stone that symbolize "The Mountain of Despair," and a 450-foot Inscription Wall containing excerpts from many of his speeches and sermons. On October 16, 2011 President Barack Obama (b. 1961) gave the following speech at the dedication ceremony for the monument.[22]

What, according to President Obama, is the meaning and purpose of the monument? Why and for which things, according to this speech, do we honor King? Compare his reasons to those offered by Presidents Reagan and Clinton? Whose reasons most appeal to you, and why?

An earthquake and a hurricane may have delayed this day, but this is a day that would not be denied.

For this day, we celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s return to the National Mall. In this place, he will stand for all time, among monuments to those who fathered this nation and those who defended it; a black preacher with no official rank or title who somehow gave voice to our deepest dreams and our most lasting ideals, a man who stirred our conscience and thereby helped make our union more perfect.

And Dr. King would be the first to remind us that this memorial is not for him alone. The movement of which he was a part depended on an entire generation of leaders. Many are here today, and for their service and their sacrifice, we owe them our everlasting gratitude. This is a monument to your collective achievement.

Some giants of the civil rights movement—like Rosa Parks and Dorothy Height, Benjamin Hooks, Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth—they've been taken from us these past few years. This monument attests to their strength and their courage, and while we miss them dearly, we know they rest in a better place.

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[22] *Watch a video recording of President Obama's dedication speech here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=QR8GEDjT-x4. To take a photographic tour of the memorial, see http://dc.about.com/od/monumentphotos/ss/MLKMemorialPhotos.htm.*

And finally, there are the multitudes of men and women whose names never appear in the history books—those who marched and those who sang, those who sat in and those who stood firm, those who organized and those who mobilized—all those men and women who through countless acts of quiet heroism helped bring about changes few thought were even possible. "By the thousands," said Dr. King, "faceless, anonymous, relentless young people, black and white . . . have taken our whole nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in the formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence." To those men and women, to those foot soldiers for justice, know that this monument is yours, as well.

Nearly half a century has passed since that historic March on Washington, a day when thousands upon thousands gathered for jobs and for freedom. That is what our schoolchildren remember best when they think of Dr. King—his booming voice across this Mall, calling on America to make freedom a reality for all of God's children, prophesizing of a day when the jangling discord of our nation would be transformed into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

It is right that we honor that march, that we lift up Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech—for without that shining moment, without Dr. King's glorious words, we might not have had the courage to come as far as we have. Because of that hopeful vision, because of Dr. King's moral imagination, barricades began to fall and bigotry began to fade. New doors of opportunity swung open for an entire generation. Yes, laws changed, but hearts and minds changed, as well.

Look at the faces here around you, and you see an America that is more fair and more free and more just than the one Dr. King addressed that day. We are right to savor that slow but certain progress—progress that's expressed itself in a million ways, large and small, across this nation every single day, as people of all colors and creeds live together, and work together, and fight alongside one another, and learn together, and build together, and love one another.

So it is right for us to celebrate today Dr. King's dream and his vision of unity. And yet it is also important on this day to remind ourselves that such progress did not come easily; that Dr. King's faith was hard-won; that it sprung out of a harsh reality and some bitter disappointments.

It is right for us to celebrate Dr. King's marvelous oratory, but it is worth remembering that progress did not come from words alone. Progress was hard. Progress was purchased through enduring the smack of billy clubs and the blast of fire hoses. It was bought with days in jail cells and nights of bomb threats. For every victory during the height of the civil rights movement, there were setbacks and there were defeats.

We forget now, but during his life, Dr. King wasn't always considered a unifying figure. Even after rising to prominence, even after winning the Nobel Peace Prize, Dr. King was vilified by many, denounced as a rabble rouser and an agitator, a communist and a radical. He was even attacked by his own people, by those who felt he was going

too fast or those who felt he was going too slow; by those who felt he shouldn't meddle in issues like the Vietnam War or the rights of union workers. We know from his own testimony the doubts and the pain this caused him, and that the controversy that would swirl around his actions would last until the fateful day he died.

I raise all this because nearly 50 years after the March on Washington, our work, Dr. King's work, is not yet complete. We gather here at a moment of great challenge and great change. In the first decade of this new century, we have been tested by war and by tragedy; by an economic crisis and its aftermath that has left millions out of work, and poverty on the rise, and millions more just struggling to get by. Indeed, even before this crisis struck, we had endured a decade of rising inequality and stagnant wages. In too many troubled neighborhoods across the country, the conditions of our poorest citizens appear little changed from what existed 50 years ago—neighborhoods with underfunded schools and broken-down slums, inadequate health care, constant violence, neighborhoods in which too many young people grow up with little hope and few prospects for the future.

Our work is not done. And so on this day, in which we celebrate a man and a movement that did so much for this country, let us draw strength from those earlier struggles. First and foremost, let us remember that change has never been quick. Change has never been simple, or without controversy. Change depends on persistence. Change requires determination. It took a full decade before the moral guidance of *Brown v. Board of Education* was translated into the enforcement measures of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, but those 10 long years did not lead Dr. King to give up. He kept on pushing, he kept on speaking, he kept on marching until change finally came.

And then when, even after the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act passed, African Americans still found themselves trapped in pockets of poverty across the country, Dr. King didn't say those laws were a failure; he didn't say this is too hard; he didn't say, let's settle for what we got and go home. Instead he said, let's take those victories and broaden our mission to achieve not just civil and political equality but also economic justice; let's fight for a living wage and better schools and jobs for all who are willing to work. In other words, when met with hardship, when confronting disappointment, Dr. King refused to accept what he called the "isness" of today. He kept pushing towards the "oughtness" of tomorrow.

And so, as we think about all the work that we must do—rebuilding an economy that can compete on a global stage, and fixing our schools so that every child—not just some, but every child—gets a world-class education, and making sure that our health care system is affordable and accessible to all, and that our economic system is one in which everybody gets a fair shake and everybody does their fair share, let us not be trapped by what is. We can't be discouraged by what is. We've got to keep pushing for what ought to be, the America we ought to leave to our children, mindful that the hardships we face are nothing compared to those Dr. King and his fellow marchers faced 50 years ago, and that if we maintain our faith, in ourselves and in the possibilities of this nation, there is no challenge we cannot surmount.

And just as we draw strength from Dr. King's struggles, so must we draw inspiration from his constant insistence on the oneness of man; the belief in his words that "we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny." It was that insistence, rooted in his Christian faith, that led him to tell a group of angry young protesters, "I love you as I love my own children," even as one threw a rock that glanced off his neck.

It was that insistence, that belief that God resides in each of us, from the high to the low, in the oppressor and the oppressed, that convinced him that people and systems could change. It fortified his belief in nonviolence. It permitted him to place his faith in a government that had fallen short of its ideals. It led him to see his charge not only as freeing black America from the shackles of discrimination, but also freeing many Americans from their own prejudices, and freeing Americans of every color from the depredations of poverty.

And so at this moment, when our politics appear so sharply polarized, and faith in our institutions so greatly diminished, we need more than ever to take heed of Dr. King's teachings. He calls on us to stand in the other person's shoes; to see through their eyes; to understand their pain. He tells us that we have a duty to fight against poverty, even if we are well off; to care about the child in the decrepit school even if our own children are doing fine; to show compassion toward the immigrant family, with the knowledge that most of us are only a few generations removed from similar hardships.

To say that we are bound together as one people, and must constantly strive to see ourselves in one another, is not to argue for a false unity that papers over our differences and ratifies an unjust status quo. As was true 50 years ago, as has been true throughout human history, those with power and privilege will often decry any call for change as "divisive." They'll say any challenge to the existing arrangements are unwise and destabilizing. Dr. King understood that peace without justice was no peace at all; that aligning our reality with our ideals often requires the speaking of uncomfortable truths and the creative tension of nonviolent protest.

But he also understood that to bring about true and lasting change, there must be the possibility of reconciliation; that any social movement has to channel this tension through the spirit of love and mutuality.

If he were alive today, I believe he would remind us that the unemployed worker can rightly challenge the excesses of Wall Street without demonizing all who work there; that the businessman can enter tough negotiations with his company's union without vilifying the right to collectively bargain. He would want us to know we can argue fiercely about the proper size and role of government without questioning each other's love for this country with the knowledge that in this democracy, government is no distant object but is rather an expression of our common commitments to one another. He would call on us to assume the best in each other rather than the worst, and challenge one another in ways that ultimately heal rather than wound.

In the end, that's what I hope my daughters take away from this monument. I want them to come away from here with a faith in what they can accomplish when they are determined and working for a righteous cause. I want them to come away from here with a faith in other people and a faith in a benevolent God. This sculpture, massive and iconic as it is, will remind them of Dr. King's strength, but to see him only as larger than life would do a disservice to what he taught us about ourselves. He would want them to know that he had setbacks, because they will have setbacks. He would want them to know that he had doubts, because they will have doubts. He would want them to know that he was flawed, because all of us have flaws.

It is precisely because Dr. King was a man of flesh and blood and not a figure of stone that he inspires us so. His life, his story, tells us that change can come if you don't give up. He would not give up, no matter how long it took, because in the smallest hamlets and the darkest slums, he had witnessed the highest reaches of the human spirit; because in those moments when the struggle seemed most hopeless, he had seen men and women and children conquer their fear; because he had seen hills and mountains made low and rough places made plain, and the crooked places made straight and God make a way out of no way.

And that is why we honor this man—because he had faith in us. And that is why he belongs on this Mall—because he saw what we might become. That is why Dr. King was so quintessentially American—because for all the hardships we've endured, for all our sometimes tragic history, ours is a story of optimism and achievement and constant striving that is unique upon this Earth. And that is why the rest of the world still looks to us to lead. This is a country where ordinary people find in their hearts the courage to do extraordinary things; the courage to stand up in the face of the fiercest resistance and despair and say this is wrong, and this is right; we will not settle for what the cynics tell us we have to accept and we will reach again and again, no matter the odds, for what we know is possible.

That is the conviction we must carry now in our hearts. As tough as times may be, I know we will overcome. I know there are better days ahead. I know this because of the man towering over us. I know this because all he and his generation endured—we are here today in a country that dedicated a monument to that legacy.

And so with our eyes on the horizon and our faith squarely placed in one another, let us keep striving; let us keep struggling; let us keep climbing toward that promised land of a nation and a world that is more fair, and more just, and more equal for every single child of God.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

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The African American Experience and The Need for Civil Rights

The Civil Rights Cases

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

In a major setback for racial equality, the US Supreme Court in the Civil Rights Cases *(1883) declared unconstitutional the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which had guaranteed—to all people under the jurisdiction of the United States, regardless of their race, color, or previous condition of servitude—equal access to and enjoyment of all public accommodations, facilities, and services. Declaring that Congress had no authority under the Fourteenth Amendment to outlaw discrimination by private individuals or groups (rather than by state and local governments), the Court legitimated the subsequent institution of Jim Crow legislation and segregation of public facilities in the South that lasted until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 declared such discrimination unlawful.*

On October 22, 1863, at a mass rally at Lincoln Hall in Washington DC protesting the court's decision, the great orator and abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass (1818–95) made an eloquent speech (excerpted here) against the decision. What is the crux of Douglass' argument? Appealing to the egalitarian intention and spirit of the Fourteenth Amendment, Douglass seems to imply that America is in contradiction with itself when it outlaws racial discrimination by state governments but sanctions it by their private citizens. Is he correct? What is the difference between civil equality and social equality? Does the first make sense without the second? Which sort of equality is required by the American Creed, "All men are created equal"? Are there any limits on what government may do to compel nondiscrimination by private individuals?

> "You take my house when you do take the prop
> That doth sustain my house; you take my life,
> When you do take the means whereby I live."[23]

Friends and Fellow-Citizens . . .

We have been, as a class, grievously wounded, wounded in the house of our friends, and this wound is too deep and too painful for ordinary measured speech.

> "When a deed is done for Freedom,
> Through the broad earth's aching breast
> Runs a thrill of joy prophetic,
> Trembling on from east to west."[24]

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[23] *From William Shakespeare's play* The Merchant of Venice, *Act 4, Scene 1. Douglass quotes Shylock's response when Antonio recommends that the state confiscate his property.*

[24] *From "The Present Crisis" (1844) by the American "Fireside" poet James Russell Lowell (1819–91). Lowell's poem addresses the national crisis over slavery leading up to the Civil War and later provided inspiration to civil rights leaders. The paper of the NAACP,* The Crisis, *is named for the poem. To read it in full, visit www.bartleby.com/42/805.html. It is also quoted in the selection by Booker T. Washington below.*

But when a deed is done from slavery, caste and oppression, and a blow is struck at human progress, whether so intended or not, the heart of humanity sickens in sorrow and writhes in pain. It makes us feel as if some one were stamping upon the graves of our mothers, or desecrating our sacred temples. Only base men and oppressors can rejoice in a triumph of injustice over the weak and defenceless, for weakness ought itself to protect from assaults of pride, prejudice and power.

The cause which has brought us here to-night is neither common nor trivial. Few events in our national history have surpassed it in magnitude, importance and significance. It has swept over the land like a moral cyclone, leaving moral desolation in its track. . . .

The Supreme Court of the United States, in the exercise of its high and vast constitutional power, has suddenly and unexpectedly decided that the law intended to secure to colored people the civil rights guaranteed to them by the following provision of the Constitution of the United States, is unconstitutional and void. Here it is: —

"No State," says the Fourteenth Amendment, "shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; or deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

Now, when a bill has been discussed for weeks and months, and even years, in the press and on the platform, in Congress and out of Congress; when it has been calmly debated by the clearest heads, and the most skillful and learned lawyers in the land; when every argument against it has been over and over again carefully considered and fairly answered; when its constitutionality has been especially discussed, pro and con; when it has passed the United States House of Representatives and has been solemnly enacted by the United States Senate (perhaps the most imposing legislative body in the world); when such a bill has been submitted to the Cabinet of the Nation, composed of the ablest men in the land; when it has passed under the scrutinizing eye of the Attorney-General of the United States; when the Executive of the Nation has given to it his name and formal approval; when it has taken its place upon the statute-book, and has remained there for nearly a decade, and the country has largely assented to it, you will agree with me that the reasons for declaring such a law unconstitutional and void should be strong, irresistible and absolutely conclusive.

Inasmuch as the law in question is a law in favor of liberty and justice, it ought to have had the benefit of any doubt which could arise as to its strict constitutionality. This, I believe, will be the view taken of it, not only by laymen like myself, but by eminent lawyers as well.

All men who have given any thought to the machinery, the structure, and practical operation of our Government must have recognized the importance of absolute harmony between its various departments and their respective powers and duties. They must have seen clearly the mischievous tendency and danger to the body politic of any antagonisms

between its various branches. To feel the force of this thought, we have only to remember the administration of President Johnson, and the conflict which then took place between the National Executive and the National Congress, when the will of the people was again and again met by the Executive veto, and when the country seemed upon the verge of another revolution. No patriot, however bold, can wish for his country a repetition of those gloomy days.

Now let me say here, before I go on a step further in this discussion, if any man has come here to-night with his breast heaving with passion, his heart flooded with acrimony, wishing and expecting to hear violent denunciation of the Supreme Court, on account of this decision, he has mistaken the object of this meeting, and the character of the men by whom it is called.

We neither come to bury Caesar nor to praise him. The Supreme Court is the autocratic point in our government. No monarch in Europe has a power more absolute over the laws, lives, and liberties of his people, than that Court has over our laws, lives, and liberties. Its Judges live, and ought to live, an eagle's flight beyond the reach of fear or favor, praise or blame, profit or loss. No vulgar prejudice should touch the members of that Court, anywhere. Their decisions should come down to us like the calm, clear light of infinite justice. We should be able to think of them and to speak of them with profoundest respect for their wisdom and deepest reverence for their virtue; for what His Holiness the Pope is to the Roman Catholic Church, the Supreme Court is to the American State. Its members are men, to be sure, and may not claim infallibility, like the Pope, but they are the Supreme law-giving power of the Nation, and their decisions are law until changed by that court.

What will be said here to-night will be spoken, I trust, more in sorrow than in anger; more in a tone of regret than of bitterness and reproach, and more to promote sound views than to find mad motives for unsound views.

We cannot, however, overlook the fact that though not so intended, this decision has inflicted a heavy calamity upon seven millions of the people of this country, and left them naked and defenceless against the action of a malignant, vulgar, and pitiless prejudice from which the Constitution plainly intended to shield them.

It presents the United States before the world as a Nation utterly destitute of power to protect the rights of its own citizens upon its own soil.

It can claim service and allegiance, loyalty and life from them, but it cannot protect them against the most palpable violation of the rights of human nature; rights to secure which governments are established. It can tax their bread and tax their blood, but it has no protecting power for their persons. Its National power extends only to the District of Columbia and the Territories—where the people have no votes, and to where the land has no people. All else is subject to the States. In the name of common sense, I ask, what right have we to call ourselves a Nation, in view of this decision and this utter destitution of power?

In humiliating the colored people of this country, this decision has humbled the Nation. It gives to the railroad conductor in South Carolina or Mississippi more power than it gives to the National Government. He may order the wife of the Chief Justice of the United States into a smoking-car full of hirsute men, and compel her to go and to listen to the coarse jests of a vulgar crowd. It gives to hotel-keepers who may, from a prejudice born of the Rebellion, wish to turn her out at midnight into the storm and darkness, power to compel her to go. In such a case, according to this decision of the Supreme Court, the National Government has no right to interfere. She must take her claim for protection and redress, not to the Nation, but to the State; and when the State, as I understand it, declares there is upon its statute-book no law for her protection, and that the State has made no law against her, the function and power of the National Government is exhausted and she is utterly without redress.

Bad, therefore, as our case is under this decision, the evil principle affirmed by the court is not wholly confined to or spent upon persons of color. The wife of Chief Justice Waite—I speak it respectfully—is protected to-day, not by the law, but solely by the accident of her color. So far as the law of the land is concerned, she is in the same condition as that of the humblest colored woman in the Republic. The difference between colored and white here is that the one, by reason of color, does not need protection. It is nevertheless true that manhood is insulted in both cases. "No man can put a chain about the ankle of his fellow-man, without at last finding the other end of it fastened about his own neck."

The lesson of all the ages on this point is, that a wrong done to one man is a wrong done to all men. It may not be felt at the moment, and the evil day may be long delayed, but so sure as there is a moral government of the universe, so sure as there is a God of this universe, so sure will the harvest of evil come. . . .

O for a Supreme Court of the United States which shall be as true to the claims of humanity as the Supreme Court formerly was to the demands of slavery! When that day comes, as come it will, a Civil Rights Bill will not be declared unconstitutional and void, in utter and flagrant disregard of the objects and intentions of the National legislature by which it was enacted and of the rights plainly secured by the Constitution.

This decision of the Supreme Court admits that the Fourteenth Amendment is a prohibition on the States. It admits that a State shall not abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States, but commits the seeming absurdity of allowing the people of a State to do what it prohibits the State itself from doing.

It used to be thought that the whole was more than a part; that the greater included the less, and that what was unconstitutional for a State to do was equally unconstitutional for an individual member of a State to do. What is a State, in the absence of the people who compose it? Land, air and water. That is all. As individuals, the people of the State of South Carolina may stamp out the rights of the Negro wherever they please, so long as they do not do so as a State, and this absurd conclusion is to be called a law. All the parts can violate the Constitution, but the whole cannot. It is not the act itself, according to this

decision, that is unconstitutional. The unconstitutionality of the case depends wholly upon the party committing the act. If the State commits it, the act is wrong; if the citizen of the State commits it, the act is right.

O consistency, thou art indeed a jewel! What does it matter to a colored citizen that a State may not insult and outrage him, if a citizen of a State may? The effect upon him is the same, and it was just this effect that the framers of the Fourteenth Amendment plainly intended by that article to prevent.

It was the act, not the instrument; it was the murder, not the pistol or dagger, which was prohibited. It meant to protect the newly enfranchised citizen from injustice and wrong, not merely from a State, but from the individual members of a State. It meant to give him the protection to which his citizenship, his loyalty, his allegiance, and his services entitled him; and this meaning and this purpose and this intention are now declared by the Supreme Court of the United States to be unconstitutional and void.

I say again, fellow-citizens, O for a Supreme Court which shall be as true, as vigilant, as active and exacting in maintaining laws enacted for the protection of human rights, as in other days was that Court for the destruction of human rights!

It is said that this decision will make no difference in the treatment of colored people; that the Civil Rights Bill was a dead letter and could not be enforced. There is some truth in all this, but it is not the whole truth. That bill, like all advance legislation, was a banner on the outer wall of American liberty; a noble moral standard uplifted for the education of the American people. There are tongues in trees, sermons in stones, and books in the running brooks. This law, though dead, did speak. It expressed the sentiment of justice and fair play common to every honest heart. Its voice was against popular prejudice and meanness. It appealed to all the noble and patriotic instincts of the American people. It told the American people that they were all equal before the law; that they belonged to a common country and were equal citizens. The Supreme Court has hauled down this broad and glorious flag of liberty in open day and before all the people, and has thereby given joy to the heart of every man in the land who wishes to deny to others the rights he claims for himself. It is a concession to race pride, selfishness and meanness, and will be received with joy by every upholder of caste in the land, and for this I deplore and denounce that decision.

It is a frequent and favorite device of an indefensible cause to misstate and pervert the views of those who advocate a good cause, and I have never seen this device more generally resorted to than in the case of the late decision on the Civil Rights Bill. When we dissent from the opinion of the Supreme Court and give the reasons why we think that opinion unsound, we are straightway charged in the papers with denouncing the Court itself, and thus put in the attitude of bad citizens. Now, I utterly deny that there has ever been any denunciation of the Supreme Court on this platform, and I defy any man to point out one sentence or one syllable of any speech of mine in denunciation of that Court.

Another illustration of this tendency to put opponents in a false position, is seen in the persistent effort to stigmatize the Civil Rights Bill as a Social Rights Bill. Now, where under the whole heavens, outside of the United States, could any such perversion of truth have any chance of success? No man in Europe would ever dream that because he has a right to ride on a railway, or stop at a hotel, he therefore has the right to enter into social relations with anybody. No one has a right to speak to another without that other's permission. Social equality and civil equality rest upon an entirely different basis, and well enough the American people know it; yet in order to inflame a popular prejudice, respectable papers like the New York *Times* and the Chicago *Tribune* persist in describing the Civil Rights Bill as a Social Rights Bill.

When a colored man is in the same room or in the same carriage with white people, as a servant, there is no talk of social equality, but if he is there as a man and a gentleman, he is an offence. What makes the difference? It is not color, for his color is unchanged. The whole essence of the thing is a studied purpose to degrade and stamp out the liberties of a race. It is the old spirit of slavery and nothing else. To say that because a man rides in the same car with another, he is therefore socially equal, is one of the wildest absurdities.

When I was in England, some years ago, I rode upon highways, byways, steamboats, stage-coaches, omnibuses. I was in the House of Commons, in the House of Lords, in the British Museum, in the Coliseum, in the National Gallery, everywhere; sleeping in rooms where lords and dukes had slept; sitting at tables where lords and dukes were sitting; but I never thought that those circumstances made me socially the equal of lords and dukes. I hardly think that some of our Democratic friends would be regarded among those lords as their equals. If riding in the same car makes one equal, I think that the little poodle I saw sitting in the lap of a lady was made equal by riding in the same car with her. Equality, social equality, is a matter between individuals. It is a reciprocal understanding. I do not think that when I ride with an educated, polished rascal he is thereby made my equal, or that when I ride with a numbskull that it makes him my equal. Social equality does not necessarily follow from civil equality, and yet for the purpose of a hell-black and damning prejudice, our papers still insist that the Civil Rights Bill is a bill to establish social equality.

If it is a bill for social equality, so is the Declaration of Independence, which declares that all men have equal rights; so is the Sermon on the Mount, so is the Golden Rule that commands us to do to others as we would that others should do to us; so is the teaching of the Apostle that of one blood God has made all nations to dwell on the face of the earth; so is the Constitution of the United States, and so are the laws and customs of every civilized country in the world; for nowhere, outside of the United States, is any man denied civil rights on account of his color.

On Being Crazy

W. E. B. DU BOIS

In the wake of the Supreme Court's 1883 ruling in the Civil Rights Cases *(see last selection), sanctioned and state-enforced segregation became the way of life in large parts of the United States. This little story, written in 1907 by W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), scholar, author, civil rights activist, and cofounder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, reports a first-person encounter with racial discrimination in public accommodations.*

Going slowly through the conversation, spell out and evaluate the positions and arguments of each of the interlocutors. Most if not all readers will cheer for the voice of Du Bois. Why? Du Bois denies that he wants social equality, but only food, rest, music, etc. Both of the speakers, in fact, seem to accept the distinction between civil equality and social equality. Can you explain and defend the difference, showing a clear boundary between them? Who is "crazy" in this dialogue? Is it crazy to deny the desirability of social equality? Is it crazy to be for civil integration and social separateness?

It was one o'clock and I was hungry. I walked into a restaurant, seated myself, and reached for the bill of fare. My table companion rose.

"Sir," said he, "do you wish to force your company on those who do not want you?"

No, said I, I wish to eat.

"Are you aware, sir, that this is social equality?"

Nothing of the sort, sir, it is hunger—and I ate.

The day's work done, I sought the theatre. As I sank into my seat, the lady shrank and squirmed.

I beg pardon, I said.

"Do you enjoy being where you are not wanted?" she asked coldly.

Oh, no, I said.

"Well, you are not wanted here"

I was surprised. I fear you are mistaken, I said, I certainly want the music, and I like to think the music wants me to listen to it.

"Usher," said the lady, "this is social equality."

“No madame,” said the usher, “it is the second movement of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony.”

After the theatre, I sought the hotel where I had sent my baggage. The clerk scowled.

“What do you want?”

Rest, I said.

“This is a white hotel,” he said.

I looked around. Such a color scheme requires a great deal of cleaning, I said, but I don’t know that I object.

“We object,” said he.

Then why, I began, but he interrupted.

“We don’t keep niggers,” he said, “we don’t want social equality.”

Neither do I, I replied gently, I want a bed.

I walked thoughtfully to the train. I’ll take a sleeper through Texas. I’m a little bit dissatisfied with this town.

“Can’t sell you one.”

I only want to hire it, said I, for a couple of nights.

“Can’t sell you a sleeper in Texas,” he maintained. “They consider that social equality.”

I call it barbarism, I said, and I think I’ll walk.

Walking, I met another wayfarer, who immediately walked to the other side of the road, where it was muddy. I asked his reason.

“Niggers are dirty,” he said.

So is the mud, said I. Moreover, I am not as dirty as you—yet.

“But you’re a nigger, ain’t you?” he asked.

My grandfather was so called.

“Well then!” he answered triumphantly.

Do you live in the South? I persisted pleasantly.

"Sure," he growled, "and starve there."

I should think you and the Negroes should get together and vote out starvation.

"We don't let them vote."

We? Why not? I said in surprise.

"Niggers is too ignorant to vote."

But, I said, I am not so ignorant as you.

"But you're a nigger."

Yes, I'm certainly what you mean by that.

"Well then!" he returned, with that curiously inconsequential note of triumph. "Moreover," he said, "I do not want my sister to marry a nigger."

I had not seen his sister, so I merely murmured, let her say no.

"By God, you shan't marry her, even if she said yes."

But—but I don't want to marry her, I answered, a little perturbed at the personal turn.

"Why not!" he yelled, angrier than ever.

Because I am already married and I rather like my wife.

"Is she a nigger?" he asked suspiciously.

Well, I said again, her grandmother was called that.

"Well, then!" he shouted in that oddly illogical way.

I gave up.

Go on, I said, either you are crazy or I am.

"We both are," he said as he trotted along in the mud.

My View of Segregation Laws

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

The previous selection, by W. E. B. Du Bois, offered a mocking literary critique of the absurdity of racial segregation in public accommodations. This selection, by Booker T. Washington (1865–1915), offers sober (and subtle) arguments against racial segregation in land and housing. Born in slavery, Washington—a celebrated educator, author, orator, statesman, and founder of the Tuskegee Institute—rose to become the most influential black leader at the turn of the twentieth century. He sought to heal the racial divide by producing robust and independent black citizens, primarily through the elevating power of basic—practical (or vocational) and moral—education.[25]

In this article, addressing white readers (The New Republic, *1915*) *and written when municipal laws prescribing residential segregation were mushrooming in the South, Washington offers multiple arguments against residential segregation. Summarize and assess those arguments. Washington makes an argument against segregation but not for integration. Why? Does this position make sense? Most striking for modern readers, Washington does not argue in the name of equality or of* rights*—civil or social—but in terms of the* common good*: "in the gain or loss of one race, all the rest have equal claim." Is he right in recommending an approach that stresses the common good, rather than the rights of individuals and races? What do you think Washington would think about a movement for black advancement that flew the banner of "Civil Rights"? Events would soon reveal that Washington was clearly wrong in his favorable assessment of his beloved state of Alabama. Does this failure cast doubt on his preference for thinking mainly in terms of education and common good, rather than of political and civil rights?*

In all of my experience I have never yet found a case where the masses of the people of any given city were interested in the matter of the segregation of white and colored people; that is, there has been no spontaneous demand for segregation ordinances. In certain cities politicians have taken the leadership in introducing such segregation ordinances into city councils, and after making an appeal to racial prejudices have succeeded in securing a backing for ordinances which would segregate the Negro people from their white fellow citizens. After such ordinances have been introduced it is always difficult, in the present state of public opinion in the South to have any considerable body of white people oppose them, because their attitude is likely to be misrepresented as favoring Negroes against white people. They are, in the main, afraid of the stigma, "Negro-lover."

It is probably useless to discuss the legality of segregation; that is a matter which the courts will finally pass upon. It is reasonably certain, however, that the courts in no section of the country would uphold a case where Negroes sought to segregate white

[25] *His critics, among whom W. E. B. Du Bois was one of the most vocal, took umbrage at his seeming indifference to liberal education and his lack of political militancy.*

citizens. This is the most convincing argument that segregation is regarded as illegal, when viewed on its merits by the whole body of our white citizens. . . .

I have never viewed except with amusement the sentiment that white people who live next to Negro populations suffer physically, mentally and morally because of their proximity to colored people. Southern white people who have been brought up in this proximity are not inferior to other white people. The President of the United States was born and reared in the South in close contact with black people. Five members of the present Cabinet were born in the South; many of them, I am sure, had black "mammies." The Speaker of the House of Representatives is a Southern man, the chairman of leading committees in both the United States Senate and the Lower House of Congress are Southern men. Throughout the country today, people occupying the highest positions not only in the government but in education, industry, and science, are persons born in the South in close contact with the Negro.

Attempts at legal segregation are unnecessary for the reason that the matter of residence is one which naturally settles itself. Both colored and whites are likely to select a section of the city where they will be surrounded by congenial neighbors. It is unusual to hear of a colored man attempting to live where he is surrounded by white people or where he is not welcome. Where attempts are being made to segregate the races legally, it should be noted that in the matter of business no attempt is made to keep the white man from placing his grocery store, his dry goods store, or other enterprise right in the heart of a Negro district. This is another searching test which challenges the good faith of segregationists.

It is true that the Negro opposes these attempts to restrain him from residing in certain sections of a city or community. He dos this not because he wants to mix with the white man socially, but because he feels that such laws are unnecessary. The Negro objects to being segregated because it usually means that he will receive inferior accommodations in return of the taxes he pays. If the Negro is segregated, it will probably mean that the sewerage in his part of the city will be inferior; that the streets and sidewalks will be neglected, that the street lighting will be poor; that his section of the city will not be kept in order by the police and other authorities, and that the "undesirables" of other races will be placed near him, thereby making it difficult for him to rear his family in decency. It should always be kept in mind that while the Negro may not be directly a large taxpayer, he does pay large taxes indirectly. In the last analysis, all will agree that the man who pays house rent pays large taxes, for the price paid for the rent includes payment of the taxes on the property.

Right here in Alabama nobody is thinking or talking about land and home segregation. It is rather remarkable that in the very heart of the Black Belt where the black man is almost ignorant the white people should not find him so repulsive as to set him away off to himself. If living side by side is such a menace as some people think, it does seem as if the people who have had the bulk of the race question to handle during the past fifty years would have discovered the danger and adjusted it long ago.

A segregated Negro community is a terrible temptation to many white people. Such a community invariably provides certain types of white men with hiding-places—hiding-places from the law, from decent people of their own race, from their churches and their wives and daughters. In a Negro district in a certain city in the South a house of ill-repute for white men was next door to a Negro denominational school. In another town a similar kind of house is just across the street from the Negro grammar school. In New Orleans the legalized vice section is set in the midst of the Negro section, and near the spot where stood a Negro school and a Negro church, and near the place where the Negro orphanage now operates. Now when a Negro seeks to buy a house in a reputable street he does it not only to get police protection, lights and accommodations, but to remove his children to a locality in which vice is not paraded. . . .

White people who argue for the segregation of the masses of black people forget the tremendous power of objective teaching. To hedge any set of people off in a corner and sally among them now and then with a lecture or a sermon is merely to add misery to degradation. But put the black man where day by day he sees how the white man keeps his lawns, his windows; how he treats his wife and children, and you will do more real helpful teaching than a whole library of lectures and sermons. Moreover, this will help the white man. If he knows that his life is to be taken as a model, that his house, dress, manners, are all to be patterns for someone less fortunate, he will deport himself better than he would otherwise. Practically all the real moral uplift the black people have got from the whites—and this has been great indeed—has come from this observation of the white man's conduct. The South today is still full of the type of Negro with gentle manners. Where did he get them? From some master or mistress of the same type.

Summarizing the matter in the large, segregation is ill advised because

1. It is unjust.

2. It invites other unjust measures.

3. It will not be productive of good, because practically every thoughtful Negro resents its injustice and doubts its sincerity. Any race adjustment based on injustice finally defeats itself. The Civil War is the best illustration of what results where it is attempted to make wrong right or seem to be right.

4. It is unnecessary.

5. It is inconsistent. The Negro is segregated from his white neighbor, but white businessmen are not prevented from doing business in Negro neighborhoods.

6. There has been no case of segregation of Negroes in the United States that has not widened the breach between the two races. Wherever a form of segregation exists it will be found that it has been administered in such a way as to embitter the Negro and harm more or less the moral fiber of the white man. That the Negro does not express this constant sense of wrong is no proof that he does not feel it.

It seems to me that the reasons given above, if carefully considered, should serve to prevent further passage of such segregation ordinances as have been adopted in Norfolk, Richmond, Louisville, Baltimore, and one or two cities in South Carolina.

Finally, as I have said in another place, as white and black learn daily to adjust, in a spirit of justice and fair play, those interests which are individual and racial, and to see and feel the importance of those fundamental interests which are common, so will both races grow and prosper. In the long run no individual and no race can succeed which sets itself at war against the common good; for "in the gain or loss of one race, all the rest have equal claim."[26]

[26] *From "The Present Crisis" (1844) by American poet James Russell Lowell (1819–91).*

Of the Coming of John
from *The Souls of Black Folk*

W. E. B. DU BOIS

In his widely celebrated and influential collection of essays, The Souls of Black Folk (1903), *W. E. B. Du Bois powerfully presents accounts of the troubled experiences of black people in America, so that, as he says at the end of the introductory chapter, "men may listen to the striving in the souls of black folk." This striving, Du Bois suggests, stems from a "double-consciousness,"*

> *this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength keeps it from being torn asunder.*
>
> *The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in the flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.*

Perhaps no tale in the collection better presents the dilemma thus described than the story presented here, "Of the Coming of John." John Jones, a lively and gifted young black man from small-town Altamaha in southeastern Georgia goes north for an education, while his home village eagerly awaits his return. After some initial successes, his aspirations for advancement up north are abruptly frustrated. But his return home and his efforts to bring education to the local black children are likewise unsuccessful. The failures of his life are set off and acted out against his external double, the white John, a playmate of his youth but several times the cause of his ruin.

What brings John to "self-conscious manhood"? Why were his dreams thwarted? Why was his homecoming such a failure—for John, his family, and his community? Should we conclude, as John seems to do in conversation with his sister, that education, at least for black folks in America, is preparation for unhappiness? Were John's efforts as a teacher of his own people foolish and futile? Is it possible for a black person in America to "merge his double self" and to achieve what Du Bois calls the end of his striving: "to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and

isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius"? Even if John Jones did not achieve it, did not W. E. B. Du Bois?[27]

What bring they 'neath the midnight,
  Beside the River-sea?
They bring the human heart wherein
  No nightly calm can be;
That droppeth never with the wind,
  Nor drieth with the dew;
O calm it, God; thy calm is broad
  To cover spirits too.
    The river floweth on.
      MRS. BROWNING.[28]

Carlisle Street runs westward from the centre of Johnstown, across a great black bridge, down a hill and up again, by little shops and meat-markets, past single-storied homes, until suddenly it stops against a wide green lawn. It is a broad, restful place, with two large buildings outlined against the west. When at evening the winds come swelling from the east, and the great pall of the city's smoke hangs wearily above the valley, then the red west glows like a dreamland down Carlisle Street, and, at the tolling of the supper-bell, throws the passing forms of students in dark silhouette against the sky. Tall and black, they move slowly by, and seem in the sinister light to flit before the city like dim warning ghosts. Perhaps they are; for this is Wells Institute, and these black students have few dealings with the white city below.

And if you will notice, night after night, there is one dark form that ever hurries last and late toward the twinkling lights of Swain Hall,—for Jones is never on time. A long, straggling fellow he is, brown and hard-haired, who seems to be growing straight out of his clothes, and walks with a half-apologetic roll. He used perpetually to set the quiet dining-room into waves of merriment, as he stole to his place after the bell had tapped for prayers; he seemed so perfectly awkward. And yet one glance at his face made one forgive him much,—that broad, good-natured smile in which lay no bit of art or artifice, but seemed just bubbling good-nature and genuine satisfaction with the world.

He came to us from Altamaha, away down there beneath the gnarled oaks of Southeastern Georgia, where the sea croons to the sands and the sands listen till they sink half drowned beneath the waters, rising only here and there in long, low islands. The

[27] *In a famous passage from* The Souls of Black Folk, *Du Bois speaks of his own successful path to culture: "I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, while smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil. Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly America? Is this the life you long to change into the dull red hideousness of Georgia? Are you so afraid lest peering from this high Pisgah, between Philistine and Amalekite, we sight the Promised Land?"*

[28] *From the ballad "A Romance of the Ganges" (1838) by English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–61). Read the full poem here: www.aol.bartleby.com/270/11/298.html.*

white folk of Altamaha voted John a good boy,—fine plough-hand, good in the rice-fields, handy everywhere, and always good-natured and respectful. But they shook their heads when his mother wanted to send him off to school. "It'll spoil him,—ruin him," they said; and they talked as though they knew. But full half the black folk followed him proudly to the station, and carried his queer little trunk and many bundles. And there they shook and shook hands, and the girls kissed him shyly and the boys clapped him on the back. So the train came, and he pinched his little sister lovingly, and put his great arms about his mother's neck, and then was away with a puff and a roar into the great yellow world that flamed and flared about the doubtful pilgrim. Up the coast they hurried, past the squares and palmettos of Savannah, through the cotton-fields and through the weary night, to Millville, and came with the morning to the noise and bustle of Johnstown.

And they that stood behind, that morning in Altamaha, and watched the train as it noisily bore playmate and brother and son away to the world, had thereafter one ever-recurring word,—"When John comes." Then what parties were to be, and what speakings in the churches; what new furniture in the front room,—perhaps even a new front room; and there would be a new schoolhouse, with John as teacher; and then perhaps a big wedding; all this and more—when John comes. But the white people shook their heads.

At first he was coming at Christmas-time,—but the vacation proved too short; and then, the next summer,—but times were hard and schooling costly, and so, instead, he worked in Johnstown. And so it drifted to the next summer, and the next,—till playmates scattered, and mother grew gray, and sister went up to the Judge's kitchen to work. And still the legend lingered,—"When John comes."

Up at the Judge's they rather liked this refrain; for they too had a John—a fair-haired, smooth-faced boy, who had played many a long summer's day to its close with his darker namesake. "Yes, sir! John is at Princeton, sir," said the broad-shouldered gray-haired Judge every morning as he marched down to the post-office. "Showing the Yankees what a Southern gentleman can do," he added; and strode home again with his letters and papers. Up at the great pillared house they lingered long over the Princeton letter,—the Judge and his frail wife, his sister and growing daughters. "It'll make a man of him," said the Judge, "college is the place." And then he asked the shy little waitress, "Well, Jennie, how's your John?" and added reflectively, "Too bad, too bad your mother sent him off,—it will spoil him." And the waitress wondered.

Thus in the far-away Southern village the world lay waiting, half consciously, the coming of two young men, and dreamed in an inarticulate way of new things that would be done and new thoughts that all would think. And yet it was singular that few thought of two Johns,—for the black folk thought of one John, and he was black; and the white folk thought of another John, and he was white. And neither world thought the other world's thought, save with a vague unrest.

Up in Johnstown, at the Institute, we were long puzzled at the case of John Jones. For a long time the clay seemed unfit for any sort of moulding. He was loud and boisterous, always laughing and singing, and never able to work consecutively at anything. He did

not know how to study; he had no idea of thoroughness; and with his tardiness, carelessness, and appalling good-humor, we were sore perplexed. One night we sat in faculty-meeting, worried and serious; for Jones was in trouble again. This last escapade was too much, and so we solemnly voted "that Jones, on account of repeated disorder and inattention to work, be suspended for the rest of the term."

It seemed to us that the first time life ever struck Jones as a really serious thing was when the Dean told him he must leave school. He stared at the gray-haired man blankly, with great eyes. "Why,—why," he faltered, "but—I haven't graduated!" Then the Dean slowly and clearly explained, reminding him of the tardiness and the carelessness, of the poor lessons and neglected work, of the noise and disorder, until the fellow hung his head in confusion. Then he said quickly, "But you won't tell mammy and sister,—you won't write mammy, now will you? For if you won't I'll go out into the city and work, and come back next term and show you something." So the Dean promised faithfully, and John shouldered his little trunk, giving neither word nor look to the giggling boys, and walked down Carlisle Street to the great city, with sober eyes and a set and serious face.

Perhaps we imagined it, but someway it seemed to us that the serious look that crept over his boyish face that afternoon never left it again. When he came back to us he went to work with all his rugged strength. It was a hard struggle, for things did not come easily to him,—few crowding memories of early life and teaching came to help him on his new way; but all the world toward which he strove was of his own building, and he builded slow and hard. As the light dawned lingeringly on his new creations, he sat rapt and silent before the vision, or wandered alone over the green campus peering through and beyond the world of men into a world of thought. And the thoughts at times puzzled him sorely; he could not see just why the circle was not square, and carried it out fifty-six decimal places one midnight,—would have gone further, indeed, had not the matron rapped for lights out. He caught terrible colds lying on his back in the meadows of nights, trying to think out the solar system; he had grave doubts as to the ethics of the Fall of Rome, and strongly suspected the Germans of being thieves and rascals, despite his text-books; he pondered long over every new Greek word, and wondered why this meant that and why it couldn't mean something else, and how it must have felt to think all things in Greek. So he thought and puzzled along for himself,—pausing perplexed where others skipped merrily, and walking steadily through the difficulties where the rest stopped and surrendered.

Thus he grew in body and soul, and with him his clothes seemed to grow and arrange themselves; coat sleeves got longer, cuffs appeared, and collars got less soiled. Now and then his boots shone, and a new dignity crept into his walk. And we who saw daily a new thoughtfulness growing in his eyes began to expect something of this plodding boy. Thus he passed out of the preparatory school into college, and we who watched him felt four more years of change, which almost transformed the tall, grave man who bowed to us commencement morning. He had left his queer thought-world and come back to a world of motion and of men. He looked now for the first time sharply about him, and wondered he had seen so little before. He grew slowly to feel almost for the first time the Veil that lay between him and the white world; he first noticed now the oppression that had not

seemed oppression before, differences that erstwhile seemed natural, restraints and slights that in his boyhood days had gone unnoticed or been greeted with a laugh. He felt angry now when men did not call him "Mister," he clenched his hands at the "Jim Crow" cars, and chafed at the color-line that hemmed in him and his. A tinge of sarcasm crept into his speech, and a vague bitterness into his life; and he sat long hours wondering and planning a way around these crooked things. Daily he found himself shrinking from the choked and narrow life of his native town. And yet he always planned to go back to Altamaha,—always planned to work there. Still, more and more as the day approached he hesitated with a nameless dread; and even the day after graduation he seized with eagerness the offer of the Dean to send him North with the quartette during the summer vacation, to sing for the Institute. A breath of air before the plunge, he said to himself in half apology.

It was a bright September afternoon, and the streets of New York were brilliant with moving men. They reminded John of the sea, as he sat in the square and watched them, so changelessly changing, so bright and dark, so grave and gay. He scanned their rich and faultless clothes, the way they carried their hands, the shape of their hats; he peered into the hurrying carriages. Then, leaning back with a sigh, he said, "This is the World." The notion suddenly seized him to see where the world was going; since many of the richer and brighter seemed hurrying all one way. So when a tall, light-haired young man and a little talkative lady came by, he rose half hesitatingly and followed them. Up the street they went, past stores and gay shops, across a broad square, until with a hundred others they entered the high portal of a great building.

He was pushed toward the ticket-office with the others, and felt in his pocket for the new five-dollar bill he had hoarded. There seemed really no time for hesitation, so he drew it bravely out, passed it to the busy clerk, and received simply a ticket but no change. When at last he realized that he had paid five dollars to enter he knew not what, he stood stock-still amazed. "Be careful," said a low voice behind him; "you must not lynch the colored gentleman simply because he's in your way," and a girl looked up roguishly into the eyes of her fair-haired escort. A shade of annoyance passed over the escort's face. "You *will* not understand us at the South," he said half impatiently, as if continuing an argument. "With all your professions, one never sees in the North so cordial and intimate relations between white and black as are everyday occurrences with us. Why, I remember my closest playfellow in boyhood was a little Negro named after me, and surely no two,—*well*!" The man stopped short and flushed to the roots of his hair, for there directly beside his reserved orchestra chairs sat the Negro he had stumbled over in the hallway. He hesitated and grew pale with anger, called the usher and gave him his card, with a few peremptory words, and slowly sat down. The lady deftly changed the subject.

All this John did not see, for he sat in a half-maze minding the scene about him; the delicate beauty of the hall, the faint perfume, the moving myriad of men, the rich clothing and low hum of talking seemed all a part of a world so different from his, so strangely more beautiful than anything he had known, that he sat in dreamland, and started when,

after a hush, rose high and clear the music of Lohengrin's swan.[29] The infinite beauty of the wail lingered and swept through every muscle of his frame, and put it all a-tune. He closed his eyes and grasped the elbows of the chair, touching unwittingly the lady's arm. And the lady drew away. A deep longing swelled in all his heart to rise with that clear music out of the dirt and dust of that low life that held him prisoned and befouled. If he could only live up in the free air where birds sang and setting suns had no touch of blood! Who had called him to be the slave and butt of all? And if he had called, what right had he to call when a world like this lay open before men?

Then the movement changed, and fuller, mightier harmony swelled away. He looked thoughtfully across the hall, and wondered why the beautiful gray-haired woman looked so listless, and what the little man could be whispering about. He would not like to be listless and idle, he thought, for he felt with the music the movement of power within him. If he but had some master-work, some life-service, hard,—aye, bitter hard, but without the cringing and sickening servility, without the cruel hurt that hardened his heart and soul. When at last a soft sorrow crept across the violins, there came to him the vision of a far-off home,—the great eyes of his sister, and the dark drawn face of his mother. And his heart sank below the waters, even as the sea-sand sinks by the shores of Altamaha, only to be lifted aloft again with that last ethereal wail of the swan that quivered and faded away into the sky.

It left John sitting so silent and rapt that he did not for some time notice the usher tapping him lightly on the shoulder and saying politely, "Will you step this way, please, sir?" A little surprised, he arose quickly at the last tap, and, turning to leave his seat, looked full into the face of the fair-haired young man. For the first time the young man recognized his dark boyhood playmate, and John knew that it was the Judge's son. The white John started, lifted his hand, and then froze into his chair; the black John smiled lightly, then grimly, and followed the usher down the aisle. The manager was sorry, very, very sorry,—but he explained that some mistake had been made in selling the gentleman a seat already disposed of; he would refund the money, of course,—and indeed felt the matter keenly, and so forth, and—before he had finished John was gone, walking hurriedly across the square and down the broad streets, and as he passed the park he buttoned his coat and said, "John Jones, you're a natural-born fool." Then he went to his lodgings and wrote a letter, and tore it up; he wrote another, and threw it in the fire. Then he seized a scrap of paper and wrote: "Dear Mother and Sister—I am coming—John."

"Perhaps," said John, as he settled himself on the train, "perhaps I am to blame myself in struggling against my manifest destiny simply because it looks hard and unpleasant. Here is my duty to Altamaha plain before me; perhaps they'll let me help settle the Negro problems there,—perhaps they won't. 'I will go in to the King, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.'"[30] And then he mused and dreamed, and planned a life-work; and the train flew south.

[29] Lohengrin, *a romantic opera by the German composer Richard Wagner (1813–83), first performed in 1850.*
[30] *Esther 4:16.*

Down in Altamaha, after seven long years, all the world knew John was coming. The homes were scrubbed and scoured,—above all, one; the gardens and yards had an unwonted trimness, and Jennie bought a new gingham. With some finesse and negotiation, all the dark Methodists and Presbyterians were induced to join in a monster welcome at the Baptist Church; and as the day drew near, warm discussions arose on every corner as to the exact extent and nature of John's accomplishments. It was noontide on a gray and cloudy day when he came. The black town flocked to the depot, with a little of the white at the edges,—a happy throng, with "Good-mawnings" and "Howdys" and laughing and joking and jostling. Mother sat yonder in the window watching; but sister Jennie stood on the platform, nervously fingering her dress,—tall and lithe, with soft brown skin and loving eyes peering from out a tangled wilderness of hair. John rose gloomily as the train stopped, for he was thinking of the "Jim Crow" car; he stepped to the platform, and paused: a little dingy station, a black crowd gaudy and dirty, a half-mile of dilapidated shanties along a straggling ditch of mud. An overwhelming sense of the sordidness and narrowness of it all seized him; he looked in vain for his mother, kissed coldly the tall, strange girl who called him brother, spoke a short, dry word here and there; then, lingering neither for hand-shaking nor gossip, started silently up the street, raising his hat merely to the last eager old aunty, to her open-mouthed astonishment. The people were distinctly bewildered. This silent, cold man,—was this John? Where was his smile and hearty hand-grasp? "'Peared kind o' down in the mouf," said the Methodist preacher thoughtfully. "Seemed monstus stuck up," complained a Baptist sister. But the white postmaster from the edge of the crowd expressed the opinion of his folks plainly. "That damn Nigger," said he, as he shouldered the mail and arranged his tobacco, "has gone North and got plum full o' fool notions; but they won't work in Altamaha." And the crowd melted away.

The meeting of welcome at the Baptist Church was a failure. Rain spoiled the barbecue, and thunder turned the milk in the ice-cream. When the speaking came at night, the house was crowded to overflowing. The three preachers had especially prepared themselves, but somehow John's manner seemed to throw a blanket over everything,—he seemed so cold and preoccupied, and had so strange an air of restraint that the Methodist brother could not warm up to his theme and elicited not a single "Amen"; the Presbyterian prayer was but feebly responded to, and even the Baptist preacher, though he wakened faint enthusiasm, got so mixed up in his favorite sentence that he had to close it by stopping fully fifteen minutes sooner than he meant. The people moved uneasily in their seats as John rose to reply. He spoke slowly and methodically. The age, he said, demanded new ideas; we were far different from those men of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,—with broader ideas of human brotherhood and destiny. Then he spoke of the rise of charity and popular education, and particularly of the spread of wealth and work. The question was, then, he added reflectively, looking at the low discolored ceiling, what part the Negroes of this land would take in the striving of the new century. He sketched in vague outline the new Industrial School that might rise among these pines, he spoke in detail of the charitable and philanthropic work that might be organized, of money that might be saved for banks and business. Finally he urged unity, and deprecated especially religious and denominational bickering. "To-day," he said, with a smile, "the world cares little whether a man be Baptist or Methodist, or

indeed a churchman at all, so long as he is good and true. What difference does it make whether a man be baptized in river or wash-bowl, or not at all? Let's leave all that littleness, and look higher." Then, thinking of nothing else, he slowly sat down. A painful hush seized that crowded mass. Little had they understood of what he said, for he spoke an unknown tongue, save the last word about baptism; that they knew, and they sat very still while the clock ticked. Then at last a low suppressed snarl came from the Amen corner, and an old bent man arose, walked over the seats, and climbed straight up into the pulpit. He was wrinkled and black, with scant gray and tufted hair; his voice and hands shook as with palsy; but on his face lay the intense rapt look of the religious fanatic. He seized the Bible with his rough, huge hands; twice he raised it inarticulate, and then fairly burst into the words, with rude and awful eloquence. He quivered, swayed, and bent; then rose aloft in perfect majesty, till the people moaned and wept, wailed and shouted, and a wild shrieking arose from the corners where all the pent-up feeling of the hour gathered itself and rushed into the air. John never knew clearly what the old man said; he only felt himself held up to scorn and scathing denunciation for trampling on the true Religion, and he realized with amazement that all unknowingly he had put rough, rude hands on something this little world held sacred. He arose silently, and passed out into the night. Down toward the sea he went, in the fitful starlight, half conscious of the girl who followed timidly after him. When at last he stood upon the bluff, he turned to his little sister and looked upon her sorrowfully, remembering with sudden pain how little thought he had given her. He put his arm about her and let her passion of tears spend itself on his shoulder.

Long they stood together, peering over the gray unresting water.

"John," she said, "does it make every one—unhappy when they study and learn lots of things?"

He paused and smiled. "I am afraid it does," he said.

"And, John, are you glad you studied?"

"Yes," came the answer, slowly but positively.

She watched the flickering lights upon the sea, and said thoughtfully, "I wish I was unhappy,—and—and," putting both arms about his neck, "I think I am, a little, John."

It was several days later that John walked up to the Judge's house to ask for the privilege of teaching the Negro school. The Judge himself met him at the front door, stared a little hard at him, and said brusquely, "Go 'round to the kitchen door, John, and wait." Sitting on the kitchen steps, John stared at the corn, thoroughly perplexed. What on earth had come over him? Every step he made offended some one. He had come to save his people, and before he left the depot he had hurt them. He sought to teach them at the church, and had outraged their deepest feelings. He had schooled himself to be respectful to the Judge, and then blundered into his front door. And all the time he had meant right,—and yet, and yet, somehow he found it so hard and strange to fit his old

surroundings again, to find his place in the world about him. He could not remember that he used to have any difficulty in the past, when life was glad and gay. The world seemed smooth and easy then. Perhaps,—but his sister came to the kitchen door just then and said the Judge awaited him.

The Judge sat in the dining-room amid his morning's mail, and he did not ask John to sit down. He plunged squarely into the business. "You've come for the school, I suppose. Well, John, I want to speak to you plainly. You know I'm a friend to your people. I've helped you and your family, and would have done more if you hadn't got the notion of going off. Now I like the colored people, and sympathize with all their reasonable aspirations; but you and I both know, John, that in this country the Negro must remain subordinate, and can never expect to be the equal of white men. In their place, your people can be honest and respectful; and God knows, I'll do what I can to help them. But when they want to reverse nature, and rule white men, and marry white women, and sit in my parlor, then, by God! we'll hold them under if we have to lynch every Nigger in the land. Now, John, the question is, are you, with your education and Northern notions, going to accept the situation and teach the darkies to be faithful servants and laborers as your fathers were,—I knew your father, John, he belonged to my brother, and he was a good Nigger. Well—well, are you going to be like him, or are you going to try to put fool ideas of rising and equality into these folks' heads, and make them discontented and unhappy?"

"I am going to accept the situation, Judge Henderson," answered John, with a brevity that did not escape the keen old man. He hesitated a moment, and then said shortly, "Very well,—we'll try you awhile. Good-morning."

It was a full month after the opening of the Negro school that the other John came home, tall, gay, and headstrong. The mother wept, the sisters sang. The whole white town was glad. A proud man was the Judge, and it was a goodly sight to see the two swinging down Main Street together. And yet all did not go smoothly between them, for the younger man could not and did not veil his contempt for the little town, and plainly had his heart set on New York. Now the one cherished ambition of the Judge was to see his son mayor of Altamaha, representative to the legislature, and—who could say?—governor of Georgia. So the argument often waxed hot between them. "Good heavens, father," the younger man would say after dinner, as he lighted a cigar and stood by the fireplace, "you surely don't expect a young fellow like me to settle down permanently in this—this God-forgotten town with nothing but mud and Negroes?" "*I* did," the Judge would answer laconically; and on this particular day it seemed from the gathering scowl that he was about to add something more emphatic, but neighbors had already begun to drop in to admire his son, and the conversation drifted.

"Heah that John is livenin' things up at the darky school," volunteered the postmaster, after a pause.

"What now?" asked the Judge, sharply.

"Oh, nothin' in particulah,—just his almighty air and uppish ways. B'lieve I did heah somethin' about his givin' talks on the French Revolution, equality, and such like. He's what I call a dangerous Nigger."

"Have you heard him say anything out of the way?"

"Why, no,—but Sally, our girl, told my wife a lot of rot. Then, too, I don't need to heah: a Nigger what won't say 'sir' to a white man, or—"

"Who is this John?" interrupted the son.

"Why, it's little black John, Peggy's son,—your old playfellow."

The young man's face flushed angrily, and then he laughed.

"Oh," said he, "it's the darky that tried to force himself into a seat beside the lady I was escorting—"

But Judge Henderson waited to hear no more. He had been nettled all day, and now at this he rose with a half-smothered oath, took his hat and cane, and walked straight to the schoolhouse.

For John, it had been a long, hard pull to get things started in the rickety old shanty that sheltered his school. The Negroes were rent into factions for and against him, the parents were careless, the children irregular and dirty, and books, pencils, and slates largely missing. Nevertheless, he struggled hopefully on, and seemed to see at last some glimmering of dawn. The attendance was larger and the children were a shade cleaner this week. Even the booby class in reading showed a little comforting progress. So John settled himself with renewed patience this afternoon.

"Now, Mandy," he said cheerfully, "that's better; but you mustn't chop your words up so: 'If—the—man—goes.' Why, your little brother even wouldn't tell a story that way, now would he?"

"Naw, suh, he cain't talk."

"All right; now let's try again: 'If the man—'"

"John!"

The whole school started in surprise, and the teacher half arose, as the red, angry face of the Judge appeared in the open doorway.

"John, this school is closed. You children can go home and get to work. The white people of Altamaha are not spending their money on black folks to have their heads crammed with impudence and lies. Clear out! I'll lock the door myself."

Up at the great pillared house the tall young son wandered aimlessly about after his father's abrupt departure. In the house there was little to interest him; the books were old and stale, the local newspaper flat, and the women had retired with headaches and sewing. He tried a nap, but it was too warm. So he sauntered out into the fields, complaining disconsolately, "Good Lord! how long will this imprisonment last!" He was not a bad fellow,—just a little spoiled and self-indulgent, and as headstrong as his proud father. He seemed a young man pleasant to look upon, as he sat on the great black stump at the edge of the pines idly swinging his legs and smoking. "Why, there isn't even a girl worth getting up a respectable flirtation with," he growled. Just then his eye caught a tall, willowy figure hurrying toward him on the narrow path. He looked with interest at first, and then burst into a laugh as he said, "Well, I declare, if it isn't Jennie, the little brown kitchen-maid! Why, I never noticed before what a trim little body she is. Hello, Jennie! Why, you haven't kissed me since I came home," he said gaily. The young girl stared at him in surprise and confusion,—faltered something inarticulate, and attempted to pass. But a willful mood had seized the young idler, and he caught at her arm. Frightened, she slipped by; and half mischievously he turned and ran after her through the tall pines.

Yonder, toward the sea, at the end of the path, came John slowly, with his head down. He had turned wearily homeward from the schoolhouse; then, thinking to shield his mother from the blow, started to meet his sister as she came from work and break the news of his dismissal to her. "I'll go away," he said slowly; "I'll go away and find work, and send for them. I cannot live here longer." And then the fierce, buried anger surged up into his throat. He waved his arms and hurried wildly up the path.

The great brown sea lay silent. The air scarce breathed. The dying day bathed the twisted oaks and mighty pines in black and gold. There came from the wind no warning, not a whisper from the cloudless sky. There was only a black man hurrying on with an ache in his heart, seeing neither sun nor sea, but starting as from a dream at the frightened cry that woke the pines, to see his dark sister struggling in the arms of a tall and fair-haired man.

He said not a word, but, seizing a fallen limb, struck him with all the pent-up hatred of his great black arm; and the body lay white and still beneath the pines, all bathed in sunshine and in blood. John looked at it dreamily, then walked back to the house briskly, and said in a soft voice, "Mammy, I'm going away,—I'm going to be free."

She gazed at him dimly and faltered, "No'th, honey, is yo' gwine No'th agin?"

He looked out where the North Star glistened pale above the waters, and said, "Yes, mammy, I'm going—North."

Then, without another word, he went out into the narrow lane, up by the straight pines, to the same winding path, and seated himself on the great black stump, looking at the blood where the body had lain. Yonder in the gray past he had played with that dead boy, romping together under the solemn trees. The night deepened; he thought of the boys at Johnstown. He wondered how Brown had turned out, and Carey? And Jones,—

Jones? Why, *he* was Jones, and he wondered what they would all say when they knew, when they knew, in that great long dining-room with its hundreds of merry eyes. Then as the sheen of the starlight stole over him, he thought of the gilded ceiling of that vast concert hall, and heard stealing toward him the faint sweet music of the swan. Hark! was it music, or the hurry and shouting of men? Yes, surely! Clear and high the faint sweet melody rose and fluttered like a living thing, so that the very earth trembled as with the tramp of horses and murmur of angry men.

He leaned back and smiled toward the sea, whence rose the strange melody, away from the dark shadows where lay the noise of horses galloping, galloping on. With an effort he roused himself, bent forward, and looked steadily down the pathway, softly humming the "Song of the Bride,"—

"*Freudig geführt, ziehet dahin*."[31]

Amid the trees in the dim morning twilight he watched their shadows dancing and heard their horses thundering toward him, until at last they came sweeping like a storm, and he saw in front that haggard white-haired man, whose eyes flashed red with fury. Oh, how he pitied him,—pitied him,—and wondered if he had the coiling twisted rope. Then, as the storm burst round him, he rose slowly to his feet and turned his closed eyes toward the Sea.

And the world whistled in his ears.

[31] *"Joyfully guided, come to this place." Although this is the opening line of the "Song of the Bride" from Wagner's* Lohengrin*, Du Bois uses "*freudig geführt*" (joyfully guided) rather than Wagner's "*treulich geführt*" (faithfully guided).*

Stranger in the Village
from *Notes of a Native Son*

JAMES BALDWIN

On the threshold of the Civil Rights Movement, author and social critic James Baldwin (1924–87) gained a widespread following in America—among whites as well as blacks—for his lacerating accounts of black suffering and American injustice. But Baldwin did more than rage. He also reflected deeply—and deeper than most commentators, then and now—on the relation between American blacks and the white Western world into which they have been forcibly inserted.

In this selection, from his collection of essays Notes of a Native Son *(1955), Baldwin first describes his experiences living as the only black person in a Swiss mountain village, where he is an object of wonder and curiosity. Then, in the excerpts reproduced here, he uses that experience of being a stranger to reflect more generally on why blacks are alienated in the West altogether and in America in particular. What, according to Baldwin, is responsible for the special difficulties that black people—and white people—face in America because of their historical relationship through the institution of slavery? How do African American slaves and their descendants differ from other slaves in human history, and also from other black people throughout the world? What does Baldwin mean by saying: "At the root of the American Negro problem is the necessity of the American white man to find a way of living with the Negro in order to be able to live with himself"? Do you think he is right? Toward the end of the selection, Baldwin seems to imply that the black-white experience in America also holds out a great promise for America. What is that promise? Is he right?*

There is a dreadful abyss between the streets of this village and the streets of the city in which I was born, between the children who shout *Neger!* today and those who shouted *Nigger!* yesterday—the abyss is experience, the American experience. The syllable hurled behind me today expresses, above all, wonder: I am a stranger here. But I am not a stranger in America and the same syllable riding on the American air expresses the war my presence has occasioned in the American soul.

Read this essay here: https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/gjay/www/Whiteness/stranger.htm.

The Battle Royal
from *Invisible Man*

RALPH ELLISON

The black man's quest for his own identity and the recognition of his humanity is the theme of Invisible Man *by Ralph Ellison (1914–94), arguably the twentieth century's greatest novel about the African American experience. (It was published in 1952). In this selection, the novel's first chapter, Ellison's young protagonist/narrator embarks on a long journey "to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: That I am nobody but myself. But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man!" Most of the chapter offers a horrifying account of the young man's degrading experiences at the hands of the town's leading white citizens before whom he has to give a prize-winning speech. But hovering over the tale, and indeed of his entire journey, is his attempt to understand the startling deathbed confession of his grandfather—a man who had been "the meekest of men" during his life, and whom he is said to "take after"—who reveals that his passivity has been a form of treason and espionage in an ongoing war, and who urges his family to "keep up the good fight": "Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swolller you till they vomit or bust wide open."*

What does the "battle royal" reveal about the town's "leading white citizens," and what is the meaning of their actions toward the young black men? How does the narrator conduct himself, and what do you think of him as a result? Is there any connection between his grandfather's instructions and the way he handles the searing, humiliating, and degrading experience?

As his prize, the narrator is presented with a "gleaming calfskin brief case," and told to "keep developing as you are and some day it will be filled with important papers that will help shape the destiny of your people." Inside the case was a scholarship to the state college for Negroes. The young man is overjoyed, as is his own community to which he returns triumphant. "I even felt safe from grandfather," he says, "whose deathbed curse usually spoiled my triumphs." But, in the end, he is unable to escape. At night, he dreams of going to a circus with his grandfather, who "refused to laugh at the clowns no matter what they did," and who later instructs him to open the brief case. Inside, the narrator finds an official envelope with a state seal. He opens it only to find another envelope, then another and another and another. The last envelope contains an engraved document, which his grandfather commands him to read out loud: "'To Whom It May Concern,' [he] intoned, 'Keep This Nigger-Boy Running.'" The narrator awakens with his grandfather's laughter ringing in his ears. What is the meaning of the young man's dream? Are you any closer to understanding what it means to be an invisible man?

It goes a long way back, some twenty years. All my life I had been looking for something, and everywhere I turned someone tried to tell me what it was. I accepted their

answers too, though they were often in contradiction and even self-contradictory. I was naive. I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer. It took me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: That I am nobody but myself. But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man!

Read the story here: http://brainmass.com/english/creative-writing/39668.

How It Feels to Be Colored Me

ZORA NEALE HURSTON

The problem of personal identity, emphasized by both James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison in the two previous selections, is managed differently by other African Americans. In this personal essay (dated 1928) discussing her own self-understanding, the American author, folklorist, and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960) appears to be anything but conflicted, alienated, or angry. On the contrary, she speaks as if being colored is no big deal for her: "I have no separate feeling about being an American citizen and colored. I am merely a fragment of the Great Soul that surges within the boundaries. My country, right or wrong." Is she being sincere or ironic? What does she mean when she says, "At certain times I have no race, I am me"? Can her identity—and our identity—as "me" ever really be utterly disconnected from race? What enables Hurston not to be angry? What is the basis of her strong sense of identity and personal self-worth?

I am colored but I offer nothing in the way of extenuating circumstances except the fact that I am the only Negro in the United States whose grandfather on the mother's side was *not* an Indian chief.

I remember the very day that I became colored. Up to my thirteenth year I lived in the little Negro town of Eatonville, Florida. It is exclusively a colored town. The only white people I knew passed through the town going to or coming from Orlando. The native whites rode dusty horses, the Northern tourists chugged down the sandy village road in automobiles. The town knew the Southerners and never stopped cane chewing when they passed. But the Northerners were something else again. They were peered at cautiously from behind curtains by the timid. The more venturesome would come out on the porch to watch them go past and got just as much pleasure out of the tourists as the tourists got out of the village.

The front porch might seem a daring place for the rest of the town, but it was a gallery seat for me. My favorite place was atop the gatepost. Proscenium box for a born first-nighter. Not only did I enjoy the show, but I didn't mind the actors knowing that I liked it. I usually spoke to them in passing. I'd wave at them and when they returned my salute, I would say something like this: "Howdy-do-well-I-thank-you-where-you-goin'?" Usually automobile or the horse paused at this, and after a queer exchange of compliments, I would probably "go a piece of the way" with them, as we say in farthest Florida. If one of my family happened to come to the front in time to see me, of course negotiations would be rudely broken off. But even so, it is clear that I was the first "welcome-to-our-state" Floridian, and I hope the Miami Chamber of Commerce will please take notice.

During this period, white people differed from colored to me only in that they rode through town and never lived there. They liked to hear me "speak pieces" and sing and wanted to see me dance the parse-me-la, and gave me generously of their small silver for

doing these things, which seemed strange to me for I wanted to do them so much that I needed bribing to stop, only they didn't know it. The colored people gave no dimes. They deplored any joyful tendencies in me, but I was their Zora nevertheless. I belonged to them, to the nearby hotels, to the county—everybody's Zora.

But changes came in the family when I was thirteen, and I was sent to school in Jacksonville. I left Eatonville, the town of the oleanders, a Zora. When I disembarked from the river-boat at Jacksonville, she was no more. It seemed that I had suffered a sea change. I was not Zora of Orange County any more, I was now a little colored girl. I found it out in certain ways. In my heart as well as in the mirror, I became a fast brown—warranted not to rub nor run.

But I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all but about it. Even in the helter-skelter skirmish that is my life, I have seen that the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less. No, I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife.

Someone is always at my elbow reminding me that I am the granddaughter of slaves. It fails to register depression with me. Slavery is sixty years in the past. The operation was successful and the patient is doing well, thank you. The terrible struggle that made me an American out of a potential slave said "On the line!" The Reconstruction said "Get set!" and the generation before said "Go!" I am off to a flying start and I must not halt in the stretch to look behind and weep. Slavery is the price I paid for civilization, and the choice was not with me. It is a bully adventure and worth all that I have paid through my ancestors for it. No one on earth ever had a greater chance for glory. The world to be won and nothing to be lost. It is thrilling to think—to know that for any act of mine, I shall get twice as much praise or twice as much blame. It is quite exciting to hold the center of the national stage, with the spectators not knowing whether to laugh or to weep.

The position of my white neighbor is much more difficult. No brown specter pulls up a chair beside me when I sit down to eat. No dark ghost thrusts its leg against mine in bed. The game of keeping what one has is never so exciting as the game of getting.

I do not always feel colored. Even now I often achieve the unconscious Zora of Eatonville before the Hegira.[32] I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background.

For instance at Barnard. "Beside the waters of the Hudson" I feel my race. Among the thousand white persons, I am a dark rock surged upon, and overswept, but through it all, I remain myself. When covered by the waters, I am; and the ebb but reveals me again.

Sometimes it is the other way around. A white person is set down in our midst, but the contrast is just as sharp for me. For instance, when I sit in the drafty basement that is

[32] *An emigration escape or flight.*

The New World Cabaret with a white person, my color comes. We enter chatting about any little nothing that we have in common and are seated by the jazz waiters. In the abrupt way that jazz orchestras have, this one plunges into a number. It loses no time in circumlocutions, but gets right down to business. It constricts the thorax and splits the heart with its tempo and narcotic harmonies. This orchestra grows rambunctious, rears on its hind legs and attacks the tonal veil with primitive fury, rending it, clawing it until it breaks through to the jungle beyond. I follow those heathen—follow them exultingly. I dance wildly inside myself; I yell within, I whoop; I shake my assegai[33] above my head, I hurl it true to the mark yeeeeooww! I am in the jungle and living in the jungle way. My face is painted red and yellow and my body is painted blue. My pulse is throbbing like a war drum. I want to slaughter something—give pain, give death to what, I do not know. But the piece ends. The men of the orchestra wipe their lips and rest their fingers. I creep back slowly to the veneer we call civilization with the last tone and find the white friend sitting motionless in his seat, smoking calmly.

"Good music they have here," he remarks, drumming the table with his fingertips.

Music. The great blobs of purple and red emotion have not touched him. He has only heard what I felt. He is far away and I see him but dimly across the ocean and the continent that have fallen between us. He is so pale with his whiteness then and I am so colored.

At certain times I have no race, I am me. When I set my hat at a certain angle and saunter down Seventh Avenue, Harlem City, feeling as snooty as the lions in front of the Forty-Second Street Library, for instance. So far as my feelings are concerned, Peggy Hopkins Joyce on the Boule Mich[34] with her gorgeous raiment, stately carriage, knees knocking together in a most aristocratic manner, has nothing on me. The cosmic Zora emerges. I belong to no race nor time. I am the eternal feminine with its string of beads.

I have no separate feeling about being an American citizen and colored. I am merely a fragment of the Great Soul that surges within the boundaries. My country, right or wrong.

Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me.

But in the main, I feel like a brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall. Against a wall in company with other bags, white, red and yellow. Pour out the contents, and there is discovered a jumble of small things priceless and worthless. A first-water diamond, an empty spool, bits of broken glass, lengths of string, a key to a door long since crumbled away, a rusty knife-blade, old shoes saved for a road that never was and never will be, a nail bent under the weight of things too heavy for any nail, a dried flower or two still a little fragrant. In your hand is the brown bag. On the ground before you is

[33] *A pole weapon used by African tribes for throwing or hurling.*
[34] *Peggy Hopkins Joyce (1893–1957), an American actress famous for her lavish lifestyle. The Boulevard Saint-Michel (Boule Mich) is one of the two major streets in the Latin Quarter of Paris.*

the jumble it held—so much like the jumble in the bags, could they be emptied, that all might be dumped in a single heap and the bags refilled without altering the content of any greatly. A bit of colored glass more or less would not matter. Perhaps that is how the Great Stuffer of Bags filled them in the first place—who knows?

From *Notes of a Native Son*

JAMES BALDWIN

In this title essay from his 1955 collection (written from France to which he had moved in 1948), James Baldwin (1924–87) interweaves the story of his response to his father's death (in 1943) with reflections on black-white relations in America, and especially in the Harlem of his youth. It was in 1943 that Baldwin met the Negro novelist, Richard Wright, author of Black Boy *(1937) and* Native Son *(1940), who became for a time Baldwin's mentor until they had a falling out when Baldwin wrote a critique of Wright's* Native Son. *The emotional struggles between son and father, pupil and mentor, are present in this essay, side by side with the deep reflections on the emotional struggles he experiences in relation to white America. In 1957, Baldwin returned for a while to the United States to take part in the movement for civil rights.*

What, to begin with, was Baldwin's relation to his father, and what was his legacy from his father? What did he learn in his year living on his own in New Jersey, and what was the "dread, chronic disease" that he first contracted there? What does Baldwin learn about his father from the funeral? What does he mean when he writes, "It was the Lord who knew of the impossibility every parent in that room faced: how to prepare the child for the day when the child would be despised and how to create *in the child—by what means?—a stronger antidote to this poison than one had found for oneself"? What enables him to say, and why does he say, "blackness and whiteness did not matter; to believe that they did was to acquiesce in one's own destruction"? What is his final judgment about hatred, and about the proper stance toward injustice?*

On the 29th of July, in 1943, my father died. On the same day, a few hours later, his last child was born. Over a month before this, while all our energies were concentrated in waiting for these events, there had been, in Detroit, one of the bloodiest race riots of the century. A few hours after my father's funeral, while he lay in state in the undertaker's chapel, a race riot broke out in Harlem. On the morning of the 3rd of August, we drove my father to the graveyard through a wilderness of smashed plate glass.

Read the essay here: http://english.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/baldwin-native-son.original.pdf.

One Friday Morning

LANGSTON HUGHES

Even in the not-officially-segregated North, there was often a wide gulf between the color-blindness of the American dream and the racial discrimination in daily life, which, early in their lives, crushed the aspirations and dashed the hopes of promising young black Americans. In this story (published in 1941), celebrated poet, novelist, and playwright Langston Hughes (1902–67) describes such an incident in the life of a talented and proud American high school student, Nancy Lee Johnson, whose family had moved from the Deep South to the North so that she might have better opportunities. Describe Nancy Lee. What do we learn about her from her picture, which "had come out of her soul, her own life"? What, to begin with, are her attitudes toward her country and toward her race? Has it changed by the end? What do you think of Miss O'Shay's speech to Nancy Lee, and can her story about the Irish become Nancy Lee's? Is Nancy Lee's hope at the end unrealistic? Has the move North been in vain? Is color-blindness a possible or desirable prospect in America—for blacks? For whites? For everyone? If racial prejudice is at odds with the American Dream, what about racial pride and racial preferences?

The thrilling news did not come directly to Nancy Lee, but it came in little indirections that finally added themselves up to one tremendous fact: she had won the prize! But being a calm and quiet young lady, she did not say anything, although the whole high school buzzed with rumors, guesses, reportedly authentic announcements on the part of students who had no right to be making announcements at all—since no student really knew yet who had won this year's art scholarship.

But Nancy Lee's drawing was so good, her lines so sure, her colors so bright and harmonious, that certainly no other student in the senior art class at George Washington High was thought to have very much of a chance. Yet you never could tell. Last year nobody had expected Joe Williams to win the Artist Club scholarship with that funny modernistic water color he had done of the high-level bridge. In fact, it was hard to make out there was a bridge until you had looked at the picture a long time. Still, Joe Williams got the prize, was feted by the community's leading painters, club women, and society folks at a big banquet at the Park-Rose Hotel, and was now an award student at the Art School—the city's only art school.

Nancy Lee Johnson was a colored girl, a few years out of the South. But seldom did her high-school classmates think of her as colored. She was smart, pretty and brown, and fitted in well with the life of the school. She stood high in scholarship, played a swell game of basketball, had taken part in the senior musical in a soft, velvety voice, and had never seemed to intrude or stand out, except in pleasant ways so it was seldom even mentioned—her color.

Nancy Lee sometimes forgot she was colored herself. She liked her classmates and her school. Particularly she like her art teacher, Miss Dietrich, the tall red-haired woman who taught her law and order in doing things; and the beauty of working step by step until a job is done; a picture finished; a design created; or a block print carved out of nothing but an idea and a smooth square of linoleum, inked, proofs made, and finally put down on paper—clean, sharp, beautiful, individual, unlike any other in the world, thus making the paper have a meaning nobody else could give it except Nancy Lee. That was the wonderful thing about true creation. You made something nobody else on earth could make—but you.

Miss Dietrich was the kind of teacher who brought out the best in her students—but their own best, not anybody else's copied best. For anybody else's best, great though it might be, even Michelangelo's, wasn't enough to please Miss Dietrich, dealing with the creative impulses of young men and women living in an American city in the Middle West, and being American.

Nancy Lee was proud of being American, a Negro American with blood out of Africa a long time ago, too many generations back to count. But her parents had taught her the beauties of Africa, its strength, its song, its mighty rivers, its early smelting of iron, its building of the pyramids, and its ancient and important civilizations. And Miss Dietrich had discovered for her the sharp and humorous lines of African sculpture, Benin, Congo, Makonde. Nancy Lee's father was a mail carrier, her mother a social worker in a city settlement house. Both parents had been to Negro colleges in the South. And her mother had gotten a further degree in social work from a Northern university. Her parents were, like most Americans, simple, ordinary people who had worked hard and steadily for their education. Now they were trying to make it easier for Nancy Lee to achieve learning than it had been for them. They would be very happy when they heard of the award to their daughter—yet Nancy did not tell them. To surprise them would be better. Besides, there had been a promise.

Casually one day, Miss Dietrich asked Nancy Lee what color frame she thought would be best on her picture. That had been the first inkling.

"Blue," Nancy Lee said. Although the picture had been entered in the Artist Club contest a month ago, Nancy Lee did not hesitate in her choice of color for the possible frame, since she could still see her picture clearly in her mind's eye—for that picture waiting for the blue frame had come out of her soul, her own life, and had bloomed into miraculous being with Miss Dietrich's help. It was, she knew, the best water color she had painted in her four years as a high-school art student, and she was glad she had made something Miss Dietrich liked well enough to permit her to enter in the contest before she graduated.

It was not a modernistic picture in the sense that you had to look at it a long time to understand what it meant. It was just a simple scene in the city park on a spring day with the trees still leaflessly lacy against the sky, the new grass fresh and green, a flag on a tall pole in the center, children playing, and an old Negro woman sitting on a bench with her

head turned. A lot for one picture, to be sure, but it was not there in heavy and final detail like a calendar. Its charm was that everything was light and airy, happy like spring, with a lot of blue sky, paper-white clouds, and air showing through. You could tell that the old Negro woman was looking at the flag, and that the flag was proud in the spring breeze, and that the breeze helped to make the children's dresses billow as they played.

Miss Dietrich had taught Nancy Lee how to paint spring, people, and a breeze on what was only a plain white piece of paper from the supply closet. But Miss Dietrich had not said make it like any other spring-people-breeze ever seen before. She let it remain Nancy Lee's own. That is how the old Negro woman happened to be there looking at the flag—for in her mind the flag, the spring, and the woman formed a kind of triangle holding a dream Nancy Lee wanted to express. White stars on a blue field, spring, children, ever-growing life, and an old woman. Would the judges at the Artist Club like it?

One wet, rainy April afternoon Miss O'Shay, the girls' vice principal, sent for Nancy Lee to stop by her office as school closed. Pupils without umbrellas or raincoats were clustered in doorways hoping to make it home between showers. Outside the skies were gray. Nancy Lee's thoughts were suddenly gray, too.

She did not think she had done anything wrong, yet that tight little knot came in her throat just the same as she approached Miss O'Shay's door. Perhaps she had banged her locker too often and too hard. Perhaps the note in French she had written to Sallie halfway across the study hall just for fun had never gotten to Sallie but into Miss O'Shay's hands instead. Or maybe she was failing in some subject and wouldn't be allowed to graduate. Chemistry! A pang went through the pit of her stomach.

She knocked on Miss O'Shay's door. That familiarly solid and competent voice said, "Come in."

Miss O'Shay had a way of making you feel welcome, even if you came to be expelled.

"Sit down, Nancy Lee Johnson," said Miss O'Shay. "I have something to tell you." Nancy Lee sat down. "But I must ask you to promise not to tell anyone yet."

"I won't, Miss O'Shay," Nancy Lee said, wondering what on earth the principal had to say to her.

"You are about to graduate," Miss O'Shay said. "And we shall miss you. You have been an excellent student, Nancy, and you will not be without honors on the senior list, as I am sure you know."

At that point there was a light knock on the door. Miss O'Shay called out, "Come in," and Miss Dietrich entered. "May I be part of this, too?" she asked, tall and smiling.

"Of course," Miss O'Shay said. "I was just telling Nancy Lee what we thought of her. But I hadn't gotten around to giving her the news. Perhaps, Miss Dietrich, you'd like to tell her yourself."

Miss Dietrich was always direct. "Nancy Lee," she said, "your picture has won the Artist Club scholarship."

The slender brown girl's eyes widened, her heart jumped, then her throat tightened again. She tried to smile, but instead tears came to her eyes.

"Dear Nancy Lee," Miss O'Shay said, "we are so happy for you." The elderly white woman took her hand and shook it warmly while Miss Dietrich beamed with pride.

Nancy Lee must have danced all the way home. She never remembered quite how she got there through the rain. She hoped she had been dignified. But certainly she hadn't stopped to tell anybody her secret on the way. Raindrops, smiles, and tears mingled on her brown cheeks. She hoped her mother hadn't yet gotten home and that the house was empty. She wanted to have time to calm down and look natural before she had to see anyone. She didn't want to be bursting with excitement—having a secret to contain.

Miss O'Shay's calling her to the office had been in the nature of a preparation and a warning. The kind, elderly vice-principal said she did not believe in catching young ladies unawares, even with honors, so she wished her to know about the coming award. In making acceptance speeches she wanted her to be calm, prepared, not nervous, overcome, and frightened. So Nancy Lee was asked to think what she would say when the scholarship was conferred upon her a few days hence, both at the Friday morning high-school assembly hour, when the announcement would be made, and at the evening banquet of the Artist Club. Nancy Lee promised the vice-principal to think calmly about what she would say.

Miss Dietrich had then asked for some facts about her parents, her background, and her life, since such material would probably be desired for the papers. Nancy Lee had told her how, six years before, they had come up from the Deep South, her father having been successful in achieving a transfer from one post office to another, a thing he had long sought in order to give Nancy Lee a chance to go to school in the North. Now they lived in a modest Negro neighborhood, went to see the best plays when they came to town, and had been saving to send Nancy Lee to art school, in case she were permitted to enter. But the scholarship would help a great deal, for they were not rich people.

"Now Mother can have a new coat next winter," Nancy Lee thought, "because my tuition will be covered for the first year. And once in art school, there are other scholarships I can win."

Dreams began to dance through her head, plans and ambitions, beauties she would create for herself, her parents, and the Negro people—for Nancy Lee possessed a deep and reverent race pride. She could see the old woman in her picture (really her

grandmother in the South) lifting her head to the bright stars on the flag in the distance. A Negro in America! Often hurt, discriminated against, sometimes lynched—but always there were the stars on the blue body of the flag. Was there any other flag in the world that had so many stars? Nancy Lee thought deeply but she could remember none in all the encyclopedias or geographies she had ever looked into.

"Hitch your wagon to a star," Nancy Lee thought, dancing home in the rain. "Who were our flag-makers?"

Friday morning came, the morning when the world would know—her high-school world, the newspaper world, her mother and dad. Dad could not be there at the assembly to hear the announcement, nor see her prize picture displayed on the stage, nor listen to Nancy Lee's little speech of acceptance, but Mother would be able to come, although Mother was much puzzled as to why Nancy Lee was so insistent she be at school on that particular Friday morning.

When something is happening, something new and fine, something that will change your very life, it is hard to go to sleep at night for thinking about it, and hard to keep your heart from pounding, or a strange little knot of joy from gathering in your throat. Nancy Lee had taken her bath, brushed her hair until it glowed, and had gone to bed thinking about the next day, the big day when, before three thousand students, she would be the one student honored, her painting the one painting to be acclaimed as the best of the year from all the art classes of the city. Her short speech of gratitude was ready. She went over it in her mind, not word for word (because she didn't want it to sound as if she had learned it by heart) but she let the thoughts flow simply and sincerely through her consciousness many times.

When the president of the Artist Club presented her with the medal and scroll of the scholarship award, she would say:

"Judges and members of the Artist Club. I want to thank you for this award that means so much to me personally and through me to my people, the colored people of this city who, sometimes, are discouraged and bewildered, thinking that color and poverty are against them. I accept this award with gratitude and pride, not for myself alone, but for my race that believes in American opportunity and American fairness—and the bright stars in our flag. I thank Miss Dietrich and the teachers who made it possible for me to have the knowledge and training that lie behind this honor you have conferred upon my painting. When I came here from the South a few years ago, I was not sure how you would receive me. You received me well. You have given me a chance and helped me along the road I wanted to follow. I suppose the judges know that every week here at assembly the students of this school pledge allegiance to the flag. I shall try to be worthy of that pledge, and of the help and friendship and understanding of my fellow citizens of whatever race or creed, and of our American dream of 'Liberty and justice for all!'"

That would be her response before the students in the morning. How proud and happy the Negro pupils would be, perhaps almost as proud as they were of the one colored star

on the football team. Her mother would probably cry with happiness. Thus Nancy Lee went to sleep dreaming of a wonderful tomorrow.

The bright sunlight of an April morning woke her. There was breakfast with her parents—their half-amused and puzzled faces across the table, wondering what could be this secret that made her eyes so bright. The swift walk to school; the clock in the tower almost nine; hundreds of pupils streaming into the long, rambling old building that was the city's largest high school; the sudden quiet of the homeroom after the bell rang; then the teacher opening her record book to call the roll. But just before she began, she looked across the room until her eyes located Nancy Lee.

"Nancy," she said, "Miss O'Shay would like to see you in her office, please."

Nancy Lee rose and went out while the names were being called and the word *present* added its period to each name. Perhaps, Nancy Lee thought, the reporters from the papers had already come. Maybe they wanted to take her picture before assembly, which wasn't until ten o'clock. (Last year they had had the photograph of the winner of the award in the morning papers as soon as the announcement had been made.)

Nancy Lee knocked at Miss O'Shay's door.

"Come in."

The vice-principal stood at her desk. There was no one else in the room. It was very quiet.

"Sit down, Nancy Lee," she said. Miss O'Shay did not smile. There was a long pause. The seconds went by slowly. "I do not know how to tell you what I have to say," the elderly woman began, her eyes on the papers on her desk. "I am indignant and ashamed for myself and for this city." Then she lifted her eyes and looked at Nancy Lee in the neat blue dress sitting there before her. "You are not to receive the scholarship this morning."

Outside in the hall the electric bells announcing the first period rang, loud and interminably long. Miss O'Shay remained silent. To the brown girl there in the chair, the room grew suddenly smaller, smaller, smaller, and there was no air. She could not speak.

Miss O'Shay said, "When the committee learned that you were colored, they changed their plans."

Still Nancy Lee said nothing, for there was no air to give breath to her lungs.

"Here is the letter from the committee, Nancy Lee." Miss O'Shay picked it up and read the final paragraph to her.

"'It seems to us wiser to arbitrarily rotate the award among the various high schools of the city from now on. And especially in this case since the student chosen happens to

be colored, a circumstance which unfortunately, had we known, might have prevented this embarrassment. But there have never been any Negro students in the local art school, and the presence of one there might create difficulties for all concerned. We have high regard for the quality for Nancy Lee Johnson's talent, but we do not feel it would be fair to honor it with the Artist Club award.'" Miss O'Shay paused. She put the letter down.

"Nancy Lee, I am very sorry to have to give you this message."

"But my speech," Nancy Lee said, "was about . . ." The words stuck in her throat. ". . . about America."

Miss O'Shay had risen, she turned her back and stood looking out the window at the spring tulips in the school yard.

"I thought, since the award would be made at assembly right after our oath of allegiance," the words tumbled almost hysterically from Nancy Lee's throat now, "I would put part of the flag salute in my speech. You know, Miss O'Shay, that part of 'liberty and justice for all.'"

"I know," said Miss O'Shay slowly facing the room again. "But America is only what we who believe in it make it. I am Irish. You may not know, Nancy Lee, but years ago we were called the dirty Irish, and mobs rioted against us in the big cities, and we were invited to go back where we came from. But we didn't go. And we didn't give up, because we believed in the American dream, and in our power to make that dream come true. Difficulties, yes. Mountains to climb, yes. Discouragements to face, yes. Democracy to make, yes. That is it, Nancy Lee! We still have in this world of ours democracy to *make*. You and I, Nancy Lee. But the premise and the base are here, the lines of the Declaration of Independence and the words of Lincoln are here, and the stars in our flag. Those who deny you this scholarship do not know the meaning of those stars, but it's up to us to make them know. As a teacher in the public schools of this city, I myself will go before the school board and ask them to remove from our system the offer of any prizes or awards denied to any student because of race or color."

Suddenly Miss O'Shay stopped speaking. Her clear, clear blue eyes looked into those of the girl before her. The woman's eyes were full of strength and courage. "Lift up your head, Nancy Lee, and smile at me."

Miss O'Shay stood against the open window with the green lawn and the tulips beyond, the sunlight tangled in her gray hair, her voice an electric flow of strength to the hurt spirit of Nancy Lee. The Abolitionists who believed in freedom when there was slavery must have been like that. The first white teachers who went into the Deep South to teach the freed slaves must have been like that. All those who stand against ignorance, narrowness, hate, and mud on stars must be like that.

Nancy Lee lifted her head and smiled. The bell for assembly rang. She went through the long hall filled with students toward the auditorium.

"There will be other awards," Nancy Lee thought. "There're schools in other cities. This won't keep me down. But when I'm a woman, I'll fight to see that these things don't happen to other girls as this has happened to me. And men and women like Miss O'Shay will help me."

She took her seat among the seniors. The doors of the auditorium closed. As the principal came onto the platform, the students rose and turned their eyes to the flag on the stage.

One hand went to the heart, the other outstretched toward the flag. Three thousand voices spoke. Among them was the voice of a dark girl whose cheeks were suddenly wet with tears, ". . . one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

"That is the land we must make," she thought.

God Bless America

JOHN O. KILLENS

The absurdity of racial discrimination and segregation is rarely more evident than when it appears in the armed forces, as Americans of all races are called upon to fight and risk their lives for our common country. This poignant tale (1952) by black novelist, essayist, editor, and cofounder of the Harlem Writers Guild John Oliver Killens (1916–87) drives the point home. Although African Americans had fought in all of America's wars, with over one million serving in the armed forces during World War II, all branches of the military were segregated until 1948, when President Harry Truman, by executive order, abolished segregation in the armed forces and ordered full integration of the services. Resistance persisted and implementation was slow; full integration was not achieved until after the end of the Korean War, the time period in which Killens' story is set. It deals with the departure of a Negro soldier, Joe, headed for Korea.

How does Joe understand his military service? Why is he willing to risk his life for the United States? With whom do you identify more, Joe or his friend Luke Robinson—or Joe's wife Cleo? Why, at the end, is Joe disillusioned and angered? Why and how does Joe go forward, despite his anger and shame? Do you admire him for doing so?

Joe's dark eyes searched frantically for Cleo as he marched with the other Negro soldiers up the long thoroughfare towards the boat. Women were running out to the line of march, crying and laughing and kissing the men good-by. But where the hell was Cleo?

Read the story here:
http://books.google.com/books?id=xu4XFIpVDDIC&lpg=PP1&pg=PT324#v=onepage&q&f=false.

Liars Don't Qualify

JUNIUS EDWARDS

Notwithstanding the abundant social and personal degradations and humiliations experienced by African Americans as a result of segregation and other racist denials of equal access and human dignity, nothing compares politically to the systematic denial of their right to vote. The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1870, established that "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." But all through the South, that right was thwarted by the use of poll taxes and literacy tests, and by various informal kinds of obstruction and intimidation.

This prize-winning story, published in 1961 (before the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965) by Louisiana-born writer and entrepreneur Junius Edwards (1929–2008), poignantly recounts an episode of the latter. Will Harris, like Edwards an Army veteran, tries to register in his hometown somewhere in the South, but is given a hard time by two good ol' boys, Sam and Charlie. What is the purpose of their questions and comments? Why all the questions about Will Harris' job? What is the effect of the interrogation on each of the participants? What do you think of the way Will Harris conducted himself? What do you think of the end of the story, and Harris' encounter with the American flag? Has he lost his love of country? Were you in his place, would you have lost it?

Will Harris sat on the bench in the waiting room for another hour. His pride was not the only thing that hurt. He wanted them to call him in and get him registered so he could get out of there. Twice, he started to go into the inner office and tell them, but he thought better of it. He had counted ninety-six cigarette butts on the floor when a fat man came out of the office and spoke to him.

"What you want, boy?"

Will Harris got to his feet.

"I came to register."

"Oh, you did, did you?"

"Yes, sir."

The fat man stared at Will for a second, then turned his back to him.

As he turned his back, he said, "Come on in here."

Will went in.

It was a little office and dirty, but not so dirty as the waiting room. There were no cigarette butts on the floor here. Instead, there was paper. They looked like candy wrappers to Will. There were two desks jammed in there, and a bony little man sat at one of them, his head down, his fingers fumbling with some papers. The fat man went around the empty desk and pulled up a chair. The bony man did not look up.

Will stood in front of the empty desk and watched the fat man sit down behind it. The fat man swung his chair around until he faced the little man.

“Charlie,” he said.

“Yeah, Sam,” Charlie said, not looking up from his work.

“Charlie. This boy here says he came to register.”

“You sure? You sure that’s what he said, Sam?” Still not looking up. “You sure? You better ask him again, Sam.”

“All right, Charlie. All right. I’ll ask him again,” the fat man said. He looked up at Will. “Boy. What you come here for?”

“I came to register.”

The fat man stared up at him. He didn’t say anything. He just stared, his lips a thin line, his eyes wide open. His left hand searched behind him and came up with a handkerchief. He raised his left arm and mopped his face with the handkerchief, his eyes still on Will.

The odor from under his sweat-soaked arm made Will step back. Will held his breath until the fat man finished mopping his face. The fat man put his handkerchief away. He pulled a desk drawer open, and then he took his eyes off Will. He reached in the desk drawer and took out a bar of candy. He took the wrapper off the candy and threw the wrapper on the floor at Will’s feet. He looked at Will and ate the candy.

Will stood there and tried to keep his face straight. He kept telling himself: I’ll take anything. I’ll take anything to get it done.

The fat man kept his eyes on Will and finished the candy. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his mouth. He grinned, then he put his handkerchief away.

“Charlie.” The fat man turned to the little man.

“Yeah, Sam.”

"He says he come to register."

"Sam, are you sure?"

"Pretty sure, Charlie."

"Well, explain to him what it's about." The bony man still had not looked up.

"All right, Charlie," Sam said, and looked up at Will. "Boy, when folks come here, they intend to vote, so they register first."

"That's what I want to do," Will said.

"What's that? Say that again."

"That's what I want to do. Register and vote."

The fat man turned his head to the bony man.

"Charlie."

"Yea, Sam."

"He says . . . Charlie, this boy says he wants to register and vote."

The bony man looked up from his desk for the first time. He looked at Sam, then both of them looked at Will.

Will looked from one of them to the other, one to the other. It was hot, and he wanted to sit down. *Anything. I'll take anything.*

The man called Charlie turned back to his work, and Sam swung his chair around until he faced Will.

"You got a job?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Boy, you know what you're doing?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right," Sam said. "All right."

Just then, Will heard the door open behind him, and someone came in. It was a man.

"How you all? How about registering."

Sam smiled. Charlie looked up and smiled.

"Take care of you right away," Sam said, and then to Will. "Boy. Wait outside."

As Will went out, he heard Sam's voice: "Take a seat, please. Take a seat. Have you fixed up in a little bit. Now, what's your name?"

"Thanks," the man said, and Will heard the scrape of a chair.

Will closed the door and went back to his bench.

Anything. Anything. Anything. I'll take it all.

Pretty soon the man came out smiling. Sam came out behind him, and he called Will and told him to come in. Will went in and stood before the desk. Sam told him he wanted to see his papers: Discharge, High School Diploma, Birth Certificate, Social Security Card, and some other papers. Will had them all. He felt good when he handed them to Sam.

"You belong to any organization?"

"No, sir."

"Pretty sure about that?"

"Yes, sir."

"You ever heard of the 15th Amendment?"

"Yes, sir."

"What does that one say?"

"It's the one that says all citizens can vote."

"You like that, don't you, boy? Don't you?"

"Yes, sir. I like them all."

Sam's eyes got big. He slammed his right first down on his desk top. "I didn't ask you that. I asked you if you liked the 15th Amendment. Now, if you can't answer my questions . . ."

"I like it," Will put in, and watched Sam catch his breath.

Sam sat there looking up at Will. He opened and closed his desk-pounding fist. His mouth hung open.

"Charlie."

"Yeah, Sam." Not looking up.

"You hear that?" looking wide-eyed at Will. "You hear that?"

"I heard it, Sam."

Will had to work to keep his face straight.

"Boy, Sam said. "You born in this town?"

"You got my birth certificate right there in front of you. Yes, sir."

"You happy here?"

"Yes, sir."

"You got nothing against the ways things go around here?"

"No, sir."

"Can you read?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you smart?"

"No, sir."

"Where did you get that suit?"

"New York."

"New York?" Sam asked, and looked over at Charlie. Charlie's head was still down. Sam looked back at Will.

"Yes, sir," said Will.

"Boy, what you doing there."

"I got out of the Army there."

"You believe in what them folks do in New York?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"You know what I mean. Boy, you know good and well what I mean. You know how folks carry on in New York. You believe in that?"

"No, sir," Will said, slowly.

"You pretty sure about that?"

"Yes, sir."

"What year did they make the 15th Amendment?"

". . . 18 . . . 70," said Will.

"Name a signer of the Declaration of Independence who became a President."

". . . John Adams."[35]

"Boy, what did you say?" Sam's eyes were wide again.

Will thought for a second. Then he said, "John Adams."

Sam's eyes got wider. He looked to Charlie and spoke to a bowed head. "Now, too much is too much." Then he turned back to Will.

He didn't say anything to Will. He narrowed his eyes first, then spoke.

"Did you say *just* John Adams?"

"*Mister* John Adams," Will said, realizing his mistake.

"That's more like it," Sam smiled. "Now, why do you want to vote?"

"I want to vote because it is my duty as an American citizen to vote?"

"Hah," Sam said, real loud. "Hah," again, and pushed back from his desk and turned to the bony man.

"Charlie."

[35] *John Adams (1735–1826) was the second President of the United States, serving in office from 1797–1801. A delegate from Massachusetts to the Continental Congress, he signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Only one other signer—Thomas Jefferson—then went on to become president.*

"Yeah, Sam."

"Hear that?"

"I heard, Sam."

Sam leaned back in his chair, keeping his eyes on Charlie. He locked his hands across his round stomach and sat there.

"Charlie."

"Yeah, Sam."

"Think you and Elnora be coming over tonight?"

"Don't know, Sam," said the bony man, not looking up. "You know Elnora."

"Well, you welcome if you can."

"Don't know, Sam."

"You ought to, if you can. Drop in, if you can. Come on over and we'll split a corn whiskey."

The bony man looked up.

"Now, that's different, Sam."

"Thought it would be."

"Can't turn down corn if it's good."

"You know my corn."

"Sure do. I'll drag Elnora. I'll drag her by the hair if I have to."

The bony man went back to work.

Sam turned his chair around to his desk. He opened a desk drawer and took out a package of cigarettes. He tore it open and put a cigarette in this mouth. He looked up at Will, then he lit the cigarette and took a long drag, and then he blew the smoke, very slowly, up toward Will's face.

The smoke floated up toward Will's face. It came up in front of his eyes and nose and hung there, then it danced and played around his face, and disappeared.

Will didn’t move, but he was glad he hadn’t been asked to sit down.

“You have a car?”

“No, sir.”

“Don’t you have a job?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You like that job?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You like it, but you don’t want it.”

“What do you mean?” Will asked.

“Don’t get smart, boy,” Sam said, wide-eyed. “I’m asking the questions here. You understand that?”

“Yes, sir.”

“All right. All right. Be sure you do.”

“I understand it.”

“You a Communist?”

“No, sir.”

“What party do you want to vote for?”

“I wouldn’t go by parties. I’d read about the men and vote for a man, not a party.”

“Hah,” Sam said, and looked over at Charlie’s bowed head. “Hah,” he said again, and turned back to Will.

“Boy, you pretty sure you can read?”

“Yes, sir.”

“All right. All right. We’ll see about that.” Sam took a book out of his desk and flipped some pages. He gave the book to Will.

“Read that loud,” he said.

"Yes, sir," Will said, and began: "'When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.'"[36]

Will cleared his throat and read on. He tried to be distinct with each syllable. He didn't need the book. He could have recited the whole thing without the book.

"'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they . . .'"

"Wait a minute, boy," Sam said. "Wait a minute. You believe that? You believe that about 'created equal'?"

"Yes, sir," Will said, knowing that was the wrong answer.

"You really believe that?"

"Yes, sir." Will couldn't make himself say the answer Sam wanted to hear.

Sam stuck out his right hand, and Will put the book in it. Then Sam turned to the other man.

"Charlie."

"Yeah, Sam."

"Charlie, did you hear that?"

"What was it, Sam?"

"This boy, here, Charlie. He says he really believes it."

"Believes what, Sam? What are you talking about?"

"This boy, here . . . believes that all men are equal, like it says in The Declaration."

"Now, Sam. Now you know that's not right. You know good and well that's not right. You heard him wrong. Ask him again, Sam. Ask him again, will you?"

[36] *Read the whole Declaration of Independence at www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/declaration-of-independence.*

“I didn’t hear him wrong, Charlie,” said Sam, and turned to Will. “Did I, boy? Did I hear you wrong?”

“No, sir.”

“I didn’t hear you wrong?”

“No, sir.”

Sam turned to Charlie.

“Charlie.”

“Yeah, Sam.”

“Charlie. You think this boy trying to be smart?”

“Sam. I think he might be. Just might be. He looks like one of them that don’t know his place.”

Sam narrowed his eyes.

“Boy,” he said. “You know your place?”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“Boy, you know good and well what I mean.”

“What do you mean?”

“Boy, who’s . . . ,” Sam leaned forward, on his desk. “Just who’s asking questions, here?”

“You are, sir.”

“Charlie. You think he really is trying to be smart?”

“Sam, I think you better ask him.”

“Boy.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Boy. You trying to be smart with me?”

“No, sir.”

"Sam."

"Yeah, Charlie."

"Sam. Ask him if he thinks he's good as you and me."

"Now, Charlie. Now, you heard what he said about The Declaration."

"Ask, anyway, Sam."

"All right," Sam said. "Boy. You think you good as me and Mister Charlie?"

"No, sir," Will said.

They smiled, and Charlie turned away.

Will wanted to take off his jacket. It was hot, and he felt a drop of sweat roll down his right side. He pressed his right arm against his side to wipe out the sweat. He thought he had it, but it rolled again, and he felt another drop come behind that one. He pressed his arm in again. It was no use. He gave it up.

"How many stars did the first flag have?"

". . . Thirteen."

"What's the name of the mayor of this town?"

". . . Mister Roger Phillip Thornedyke Jones."

"Spell Thornedyke."

" . . . Capital T-h-o-r-n-e-d-y-k-e, Thornedyke."

"How long has he been mayor?"

". . . Seventeen years."

"Who was the biggest hero in the War between the States?"

". . . General Robert E. Lee."

"What does that 'E' stand for?"

". . . Edward."

"Think you pretty smart, don't you?"

“No, sir.”

“Well, boy, you have been giving these answers too slow. I want them fast. Understand? Fast.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What’s your favorite song?”

“*Dixie*,” Will said, and prayed Sam would not ask him to sing it.

“Do you like your job?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What year did Arizona come into the States?”

“1912.”

“There was another state in 1912.”

“New Mexico, it came in January and Arizona in February.”

“You think you smart, don’t you?’

“No, sir.”

“Oh, yes, you do, boy.”

Will said nothing.

“Boy, you make good money on your job?”

“I make enough.”

“Oh. Oh, you not satisfied with it?”

“Yes, sir. I am.”

“You don’t act like it, boy. You know that? You don’t act like it.”

“What do you mean?”

“You getting smart again, boy. Just who’s asking questions here?”

“You are, sir.”

"That's right. That's right."

The bony man made a noise with his lips and slammed his pencil down on his desk. He looked at Will, then at Sam.

"Sam," he said. "Sam, you having trouble with that boy? Don't you let that boy give you no trouble, now, Sam. Don't you do it."

"Charlie," Sam said. "Now, Charlie, you know better than that. You know better. This boy here knows better than that, too."

"You sure about that, Sam? You sure?"

"I better be sure if this boy here knows what's good for him."

"Does he know, Sam?"

"Do you know, boy?" Sam asked Will.

"Yes, sir."

Charlie turned back to his work.

"Boy," Sam said. "You sure you're not a member of any organization?"

"Yes, sir. I'm sure."

Sam gathered up all Will's papers, and he stacked them very neatly and placed them in the center of his desk. He took the cigarette out of his mouth and put it out in the full ash tray. He picked up Will's papers and gave them to him.

"You've been in the Army. That right?"

"Yes, sir."

"You served two years. That right?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have to do six years in the Reserve. That right?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're in the Reserve now. That right?"

"Yes, sir."

“You lied to me here, today. That right?”

“No, sir.”

“Boy, I said you lied to me here today. That right?”

“No, sir.”

“Oh, yes, you did, boy. Oh, yes, you did. You told me you wasn’t in any organization. That right?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then you lied, boy. You lied to me because you’re in the Army Reserve. That right?”

“Yes, sir. I’m in the Reserve, but I didn’t think you meant that. I’m just in it, and don’t have to go to meetings or anything like that. I thought you meant some kind of civilian organization.”

“When you said you wasn’t in an organization, that was a lie. Now, wasn’t it, boy?”

He had Will there. When Sam had asked him about organizations, the first thing to pop in Will’s mind had been the communists, or something like them.

“Now, wasn’t it a lie?”

“No, sir.”

Sam narrowed his eyes.

Will went on.

“No, sir, it wasn’t a lie. There’s nothing wrong with the Army Reserve. Everybody has to be in it. I’m not in it because I want to be in it.”

“I know there’s nothing wrong with it,” Sam said. “Point is, you lied to me here, today.”

“I didn’t lie. I just didn’t understand the question,” Will said.

“You understood the question, boy. You understood good and well, and you lied to me. Now, wasn’t it a lie?”

“No, sir.”

"Boy. You going to stand right there in front of me big as anything and tell me it wasn't a lie?" Sam almost shouted. "Now, wasn't it a lie?"

"Yes, sir," Will said, and put his papers in his jacket pocket.

"You right, it was," Sam said.

Sam pushed back from his desk.

"That's it, boy. You can't register. You don't qualify. Liars don't qualify."

"But . . ."

"That's it." Sam spat the words out and looked at Will hard for a second, and then he swung his chair around until he faced Charlie.

"Charlie."

"Yeah, Sam."

"Charlie. You want to go out to eat first today?"

Will opened the door and went out. As he walked down the stairs, he took off his jacket and his tie and opened his collar and rolled up his shirt sleeves. He stood on the courthouse steps and took a deep breath and heard a noise come from his throat as he breathed out and looked at the flag in the courtyard. The flag hung from its staff, still and quiet, the way he hated to see it; but it was there, waiting, and he hoped that a little push from the right breeze would lift it and send it flying and waving and whipping from its staff, proud, the way he liked to see it.

He took out a cigarette and lit it and took a slow deep drag. He blew the smoke out. He saw the cigarette burning in his right hand, turned it between his thumb and forefinger, made a face, and let the cigarette drop to the courthouse steps.

He threw his jacket over his left shoulder and walked on down to the bus stop, swinging his arms.

3

The Civil Rights Movement

The Movement and Its Goals

Freedom Songs

We begin this chapter not with stories or speeches but with songs. For it would be difficult, not to say impossible, to understand the Civil Rights Movement without appreciating the importance of its music. Freedom Songs, as they came to be known, accompanied marches and sit-ins, rallies and boycotts, providing encouragement against fear, and communal feeling against isolation. Equally important, the words *of the songs articulated the aspirations and goals of the Movement, in terms that united deep religious longings and secular American strivings. By giving voice to these aspirations* in song, *the music fused hearts and minds in strong and common purpose, inspiring singers and listeners alike, both black and white, with high hopes for a better tomorrow.*

Many of the Freedom Songs originated as gospel hymns or Negro spirituals, and religious themes of faith and hope, suffering and redemption figure prominently in the lyrics. Local churches became centers for meetings of the Movement, at which discussions of strategy were interspersed with group singing and prayer. To be sure, the hymns and gospel songs were sometimes jazzed up and often secularized and altered, for example, to identify specific places or targets of protest. But the continuing religious resonances of the music guaranteed that the Movement, no matter how political its goals, would always retain its spiritual flavor and mood.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. himself frequently emphasized the importance of music in the Civil Rights Movement. Early, in his memoir about the 1955–56 Montgomery Bus Boycott, Stride Toward Freedom*, he said that the songs "brought to mind the long history of the Negro's suffering." Later, during the 1961 Albany (Ga.) Movement, he said, "They give the people new courage and a sense of unity. I think they keep alive a faith, a radiant hope, in the future, particularly in our most trying hours." And in his 1964 book* Why We Can't Wait*, he called the songs ''the soul of the movement.'' Civil rights activists, he wrote, "sing the freedom songs today for the same reason the slaves sang them, because we too are in bondage and the songs add hope to our determination that 'We shall overcome, Black and White together, We shall overcome someday.'"*

Dozens of songs were associated with the Civil Rights Movement, and their histories, as well as recordings of their performance, are widely available online.[37] *We present here only a few of the more prominent ones, mainly to illustrate their range, variety, and*

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[37] *For an interesting discussion of the role of the songs in the Movement, see these personal reflections by a participant song leader, Bernice Johnson Reagon: www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/reflect/r03_music.html. Other helpful resources include: EDSITEment, "The Freedom Rider and the Popular Music of the Civil Rights Movement," http://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plan/freedom-rides-and-role-popular-music-civil-rights-movement;, Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, "'People Get Ready': Music and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s," www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/civil-rights-movement/essays/%E2%80%9Cpeople-get-ready%E2%80%9D-music-and-civil-rights-movement-1950s; and PBS, "Soundtrack for a Revolution," www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/introduction/soundtrack/.*

diverse articulations of goals and purposes. Study each song. Read each verse carefully and identify its special theme, claim, or message. Then consider the song as a whole—its content and its feeling—and try to figure out how its various themes—for example, freedom, justice, peace, and brotherhood—relate to each other. How would singing this song—especially in the company of many fellow singers—make you feel? Does it matter whether the ideas of the song are coherent or not?

Lift Every Voice and Sing

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

Although not technically a song of the Civil Rights Movement, we begin with this song to indicate that the fusion of religious and political aspirations had a long and honored place in American Negro music. Sometimes referred to as "The Negro National Hymn" or "The African American National Anthem," it was written in 1899 as a poem by James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938), distinguished author, poet, educator, politician, and early civil rights activist, who was for many years a leader in the NAACP and a promoter of the Harlem Renaissance. The poem was set to music in 1900 by his brother John Rosamond Johnson (1873–1954).

The first stanza is a call to singing: Why? The second stanza recalls the difficult journey from a gloomy past: In what mood does the stanza end, and toward what future does it point? The third stanza is a prayer: For what, and why? What does the poem suggest about the connection between being true to God and being true to America?

Watch Ray Charles perform "Lift Every Voice and Sing" on the Dick Cavett Show *in 1972 at www.youtube.com/watch?v=QU8921j20e8, and listen to the Grace Baptist Church Cathedral Choir perform the song at www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyS3HPInHtI.*

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling seas.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading a path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou Who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou Who has by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee.
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee.
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God
True to our native land.

Onward, Christian Soldiers

The appropriation of traditional religious music for political purposes is amply demonstrated by the present selection, a nineteenth-century English hymn sung to rally the troops in the early mass mobilization of the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, 1955–56. It may seem odd that this militant Christian song should be embraced by protesters of a nonviolent and secular political movement. Reading the words carefully, can you reconcile this apparent contradiction? What, according to the hymn, are "Christian soldiers"? What is their battle, who their foe, and what is their goal? Can you see the Civil Rights Movement through the lens of this hymn? Is the Civil Rights Movement, at bottom, a religious—Christian—crusade, rather than an American one?

For a musical rendition, listen to Mahalia Jackson sing "Onward, Christian Soldiers": www.youtube.com/watch?v=63yBpl6Oixo.

Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before;
Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe;
Forward into battle see His banners go!

(Refrain)
Onward, Christian soldiers,
marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.

Like a mighty army moves the church of God;
Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod;
We are not divided, all one body we,
One in hope and doctrine, one in charity.

(Refrain)

Crowns and thrones may perish,
kingdoms rise and wane,
But the church of Jesus constant will remain;
Gates of hell can never 'gainst that church prevail;
We have Christ's own promise, and that cannot fail.

(Refrain)

Onward then, ye people, join our happy throng,
Blend with ours your voices in the triumph song;
Glory, laud, and honor unto Christ the King;
This through countless ages men and angels sing.

(Refrain)

At the sign of triumph Satan's host doth flee;
On then, Christian soldiers, on to victory!
Hell's foundations quiver at the shout of praise;
Brothers, lift your voices, loud your anthems raise.

We Shall Overcome

ZILPHIA HORTON, FRANK HAMILTON, GUY CARAWAN, AND PETE SEEGER

This stirring song, derived perhaps from the gospel song "I'll Overcome Someday" composed in 1901 by Reverend Charles Albert Tindley (1851–1933), became the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement. Can you understand why? How are the different themes of the various verses—courage, togetherness, truth, the Lord, peace, unity, the whole wide world, community, friendship, racial comity, and freedom—related to each other and to the song's repeated refrain and title, "We Shall Overcome"? Are the song's many goals truly harmonizable? Fully realizable? Does it matter if they are not?

For a musical rendition, watch Joan Baez perform "We Shall Overcome" in 1965: www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlLh1H3PLtU.

We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome some day,

(Chorus)
Oh, deep in my heart I do believe
We shall overcome some day.

We'll walk hand in hand,
We'll walk hand in hand,
We'll walk hand in hand some day,

(Chorus)

The truth will make us free,
The truth will make us free,
The truth will make us free some day

(Chorus)

The Lord will see us through,
The Lord will see us through,
The Lord will see us through some day,

(Chorus)

We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome some day,

(Chorus)

We shall live in peace,
We shall live in peace,
We shall live in peace, someday,

(Chorus)

We are not alone,
We are not alone,
We are not alone some day,

(Chorus)

The whole wide world around,
The whole wide world around,
The whole wide world around some day

(Chorus)

This Little Light of Mine

HARRY DIXON LOES

This gospel song, written circa 1920, by composer and teacher, Harry Dixon Loes (1895–1965), echoes verses from the New Testament that focus on light (for example, Matthew 5:14–16 and Luke 11:33). In contrast to the last song, this one is an "I" song, rather than a "we" song. What is the significance, and what is effect of this personal emphasis, especially if we remember that the song was sung by masses of people singing together? What, exactly, is my "little light"? How does it shine? What is the difference between "letting it shine" and "making it shine"?

Listen to Betty Mae Fikes sing the song at a civil rights rally in Atlanta, Georgia in 1964: www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyyxkdVSTZw.

This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine,
This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine,
This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine,
Let it shine, shine, shine, let it shine.

Everywhere I go,
I'm gonna let it shine,
Everywhere I go,
I'm gonna let it shine
Everywhere I go,
I'm gonna let it shine
Let it shine, shine, shine, Lord, let it shine.

God give it to me,
I'm gonna let it shine,
God give it to me,
I'm gonna let it shine
God give it to me,
I'm gonna let it shine
Shine, shine, shine, Lord let it shine.

All in my home,
I'm gonna let it shine,
All in my home,
I'm gonna let it shine,
Let it shine, shine, shine, Lord let it shine.

God said, "Don't hide your light,"
I'm gonna let it shine,
"Don't hide your light,"
I'm gonna let it shine,
Let it shine, shine, shine, Lord, let it shine.

Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

ALICE WINE

This spirited song, a Movement favorite, is, like many others, a reworking of an old hymn, "Keep Your Hand on the Plow," itself based on a verse from the Gospel of Luke: "No man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God" (9:62). A new hymn with the present title, composed before World War I but of unknown authorship, is based instead on two verses from Philippians (3:17, 3:14) that urge people to "keep your eyes on those who live as we do," and that speak about pressing toward "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The lyrics were again changed during the Civil Rights Movement, in 1956, by activist Alice Wine. It is her version we present here. How does this song connect the biblical beginning with Paul and Silas to the contemporary experiences of the Freedom Riders? What, according to this song, is the prize, and where will it be found—here in America or on the other side of Jordan (in the next life)? To what extent does the song stick to its Biblical origins?

Listen to the African American a cappella ensemble Sweet Honey in the Rock sing "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize": www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_tcZAqQUAg.

Paul and Silas bound in jail,
Had no money for to go to their bail.

(Chorus)
Keep your eyes on the prize,
Hold on, hold on.
Keep your eyes on the prize,
Hold on, Hold on.

Paul and Silas begin to shout,
The jail door opened and they walked out,

(Chorus)

Freedom's name is mighty sweet,
Soon one day we're gonna meet.

(Chorus)

Got my hand on the Gospel plow,
I wouldn't take nothin' for my journey now.

(Chorus)

The only chain that a man can stand,
Is the chain of hand in hand.

(Chorus)

The only thing that we did wrong,
Stayed in the wilderness a day too long.

(Chorus)

But the one thing we did right,
Was the day we started to fight.

(Chorus)

We’re gonna board that big Greyhound,
Carrin’ love from town to town.

(Chorus)

We’re gonna ride for civil rights,
We’re gonna ride for both black and white.

(Chorus)

We’ve met jail and violence too,
But God’s love has seen us through.

(Chorus)

Haven’t been to heaven but I’ve been told,
Streets up there are paved with gold.

(Chorus)

Albenny Georgia lives in race,
We’re goin’ to fight it from place to place.

(Chorus)

I know what I think is right,
Freedom in the souls of black and white.

(Chorus)

Singing and shouting is very well,
Get off your seat and go to jail.

(Chorus)

Jordan River is deep and wide,
We’ll find freedom on the other side.

Oh, Freedom

This old Negro spiritual, written after the Civil War by an unknown author, expresses both the dignity of ex-slaves after the end of bondage and the yearning for release from the miseries of their lot after emancipation. Like many other Freedom songs, "Oh, Freedom," joins together worldly longings for freedom here and now and otherworldly hopes for redemption in the presence of the Lord. Very popular during the 1950s and 1960s, it was sung at the 1963 March on Washington by Joan Baez (b. 1941). But it is most notably associated with another song leader, the incomparable Odetta (born Odetta Holmes; 1930–2008).

What kind of freedom does this song invoke? What does it mean to speak of freedom "over me"? What are the possible meanings of the refrain, "And before I'd be a slave," etc.? What is the emotional effect of its steady repetition?

Listen to Odetta sing the song at www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEsSABmWKu8.

Oh freedom, oh freedom, oh freedom over me!
And before I'd be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free.

No more mourning, no more mourning, no more mourning over me!
And before I'd be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free.

No more shouting, no more shouting, no more shouting over me!
And before I'd be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free.

No more weeping, no more weeping, no more weeping over me!
And before I'd be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free.

Oh freedom, oh freedom, oh freedom over me!
And before I'd be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free.

I Have a Dream

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his now legendary, "I Have a Dream" speech, at "The Great March on Washington," August 28, 1963, in front of the Lincoln Memorial. The march for "jobs and freedom," organized by a diverse group of civil rights, labor, and religious organizations, drew more than 200,000 people, becoming one of the largest political rallies for human rights in our history. Many regarded it as crucial to the passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964), as well as the Voting Rights Act (1965). King's oration—part speech, part sermon, part prophecy—was the high point of the rally, remembered most for his "dream" vision of the future that articulated the aspirations of the Movement.[38]

But the speech as a whole repays close study and raises interesting questions. The speech begins (and ends) by emphasizing freedom: what does King mean by freedom, and in what sense does he regard the Negro as "still not free"? The speech then moves to speak about justice: can you say what he means by "justice"—equality of rights, equality before the law, equality of opportunity, equality of economic and social condition, or something else? How is it related to the Lord's punitive justice, prophesied by Amos, that "rolls down like waters"? And what is the connection, according to King, between justice and freedom? Might increasing justice for some require limiting freedom for others?

In recounting his dream of the future, King speaks not only of freedom and justice but also of brotherhood and sisterhood: how is this related to the other goals? Is the goal of brotherhood rooted in the American dream of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" or is it rooted in the Christian messianic vision, when "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together"? Is King, in his remark about the "color of their skin" and the "content of their character," preaching a vision of color-blind America, where race is irrelevant? Do you share such a vision today? When King concludes with the moving call "Let freedom ring," does it carry the same meaning as it does in his source, "My Country 'Tis of Thee"?[39] *What would it mean to be "free at last"?*

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree is a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity. But one hundred years later the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later the life of the

[38] *To watch King deliver his "I Have a Dream" speech, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=smEqnnklfYs.*
[39] *Read the lyrics of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" at What So Proudly We Hail: http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/songs-for-free-men-and-women/my-country-tis-of-thee-2.*

Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

Read the speech here: www.archives.gov/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf.

Neighbors

DIANE OLIVER

Integration of previously segregated public schools was an early and important goal of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s. Although required and supported by the Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education (1954),[40] *integration encountered fierce opposition in many places in the South, and black children and their families who attempted to enroll in white schools met with harassment, threats, and overt violence. A poignant story of one such family is presented in this selection by author Diane Alene Oliver (1943–66), who grew up in the black southern middle class of the 1940s and 1950s and who was herself educated in segregated public schools. Oliver was a friend of the first black student to attend Harding High School in Charlotte, North Carolina. This story, published in the year of her untimely death at age 22, is based on that historical event. It allows modern readers to re-experience what it was like for a black family to break the color line in public education.*

What are the arguments, given by Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell, about whether or not to allow their son Tommy to enroll in the white school the next morning? Whose argument do you find more persuasive? Imagining yourself as one of Tommy's parents, what do you think you would have decided to do, and why? Imagining yourself as Tommy, what do you think you would have said or done? Of what significance is Ellie Mitchell, Tommy's older sister, in the story? What is the meaning of the story's title? What connections can you make between this story and King's "Dream"?

The bus turning the corner of Patterson and Talford Avenue was dull this time of evening. Of the four passengers standing in the rear, she did not recognize any of her friends. Most of the people tucked neatly in the double seats were women, maids and cooks on their way from work or secretaries who had worked late and were riding from the office building at the mill. The cotton mill was out from town, near the house where she worked. She noticed that a few men were riding too. They were obviously just working men, except for one gentleman dressed very neatly in a dark grey suit and carrying what she imagined was a push-button umbrella.

He looked to her as though he usually drove a car to work. She immediately decided that the car probably wouldn't start this morning so he had to catch the bus to and from work. She was standing in the rear of the bus, peering at the passengers, her arms barely reaching the overhead railing, trying not to wobble with every lurch. But every corner the bus turned pushed her head toward a window. And her hair was coming down too, wisps of black curls swung between her eyes. She looked at the people around her. Some of them were white, but most of them were her color. Looking at the passengers at least kept her from thinking of tomorrow. But really she would be glad when it came, then everything would be over.

[40] *See the text of Chief Justice Earl Warren's opinion in* Brown *below.*

She took a firmer grip on the green leather seat and wished she had on her glasses. The man with the umbrella was two people ahead of her on the other side of the bus, so she could see him between other people very clearly. She watched as he unfolded the evening newspaper, craning her neck to see what was on the front page. She stood, impatiently trying to read the headlines, when she realized he was staring up at her rather curiously. Biting her lips she turned her head and stared out the window until the downtown section was in sight.

She would have to wait until she was home to see if they were in the newspaper again. Sometimes she felt that if another person snapped a picture of them she would burst out screaming. Last Monday reporters were already inside the pre-school clinic when she took Tommy for his last polio shot. She didn't understand how anybody could be so heartless to a child. The flashbulb went off right when the needle went in and all the picture showed was Tommy's open mouth.

The bus pulling up to the curb jerked to a stop, startling her and confusing her thoughts. Clutching in her hand the paper bag that contained her uniform, she pushed her way toward the door. By standing in the back of the bus, she was one of the first people to step to the ground. Outside the bus, the evening air felt humid and uncomfortable and her dress kept sticking to her. She looked up and remembered that the weatherman had forecast rain. Just their luck—why, she wondered, would it have to rain on top of everything else?

As she walked along, the main street seemed unnaturally quiet but she decided her imagination was merely playing tricks. Besides, most of the stores had been closed since five o'clock.

She stopped to look at a reversible raincoat in Ivey's window, but although she had a full time job now, she couldn't keep her mind on clothes. She was about to continue walking when she heard a horn blowing. Looking around, half-scared but also curious, she saw a man beckoning to her in a grey car. He was nobody she knew but since a nicely dressed woman was with him in the front seat, she walked to the car.

"You're Jim Mitchell's girl, aren't you?" he questioned. "You Ellie or the other one?"

She nodded yes, wondering who he was and how much he had been drinking.

"Now honey," he said leaning over the woman, "you don't know me but your father does and you tell him that if anything happens to that boy of his tomorrow we're ready to set things straight." He looked her straight in the eye and she promised to take home the message.

Just as the man was about to step on the gas, the woman reached out and touched her arm. "You hurry up home, honey, it's about dark out here."

Before she could find out their names, the Chevrolet had disappeared around a corner. Ellie wished someone would magically appear and tell her everything that had happened since August. Then maybe she could figure out what was real and what she had been imagining for the past couple of days.

She walked past the main shopping district up to Tanner’s where Saraline was standing in the window peeling oranges. Everything in the shop was painted orange and green and Ellie couldn’t help thinking that poor Saraline looked out of place. She stopped to wave to her friend who pointed the knife to her watch and then to her boyfriend standing in the rear of the shop. Ellie nodded that she understood. She knew Sara wanted her to tell her grandfather that she had to work late again. Neither one of them could figure out why he didn’t like Charlie. Saraline had finished high school three years ahead of her and it was time for her to be getting married. Ellie watched as her friend stopped peeling the orange long enough to cross her fingers. She nodded again but she was afraid all the crossed fingers in the world wouldn’t stop the trouble tomorrow.

She stopped at the traffic light and spoke to a shriveled woman hunched against the side of a building. Scuffing the bottom of her sneakers on the curb she waited for the woman to open her mouth and grin as she usually did. The kids used to bait her to talk, and since she didn’t have but one tooth in her whole head they called her Doughnut Puncher. But the woman was still, the way everything else had been all week.

From where Ellie stood, across the street from the Sears and Roebuck parking lot, she could see their house, all of the houses on the single street white people called Welfare Row. Those newspaper men always made her angry. All of their articles showed how rough the people were on their street. And the reporters never said her family wasn’t on welfare, the papers always said the family lived on that street. She paused to look across the street at a group of kids pouncing on one rubber ball. There were always white kids around their neighborhood mixed up in the games, but playing with them was almost an unwritten rule. When everybody started going to school, nobody played together any more.

She crossed at the corner ignoring the cars at the stop light and the closer she got to her street the more she realized that the newspaper was right. The houses were ugly, there were not even any trees, just patches of scraggly bushes and grasses. As she cut across the sticky asphalt pavement covered with cars she was conscious of the parking lot floodlights casting a strange glow on her street. She stared from habit at the house on the end of the block and except for the way the paint was peeling they all looked alike to her. Now at twilight the flaking grey paint had a luminous glow and as she walked down the dirt sidewalk she noticed Mr. Paul’s pipe smoke added to the hazy atmosphere. Mr. Paul would be sitting in that same spot waiting until Saraline came home. Ellie slowed her pace to speak to the elderly man sitting on the porch.

“Evening, Mr. Paul,” she said. Her voice sounded clear and out of place on the vacant street.

"Eh, who's that?" Mr. Paul leaved over the rail, "What you say, girl?"

"How are you?" she hollered louder. "Sara said she'd be late tonight, she has to work." She waited for the words to sink in.

His head had dropped and his eyes were facing his lap. She could see that he was disappointed. "Couldn't help it," he said finally. "Reckon they needed her again." Then as if he suddenly remembered he turned toward her.

"You people be ready down there? Still gonna let him go tomorrow?"

She looked at Mr. Paul between the missing rails on his porch, seeing how his rolled up trousers seemed to fit exactly in the vacant banister space.

"Last I heard this morning we're still letting him go," she said.

Mr. Paul had shifted his weight back to the chair. "Don't reckon they'll hurt him," he mumbled, scratching the side of his face. "Hope he don't mind being spit on though. Spitting ain't like cutting. They can spit on him and nobody'll ever know who did it," he said, ending his words with a quiet chuckle.

Ellie stood on the sidewalk grinding her heel in the dirt waiting for the old man to finish talking. She was glad somebody found something funny to laugh at. Finally he shut up.

"Goodbye, Mr. Paul," she waved. Her voice sounded loud to her own ears. But she knew the way her head ached intensified noises. She walked home faster, hoping they had some aspirin in the house and that those men would leave earlier tonight.

From the front of her house she could tell that the men were still there. The living room light shone behind the yellow shades, coming through brighter in the patched places. She thought about moving the geranium pot from the porch to catch the rain but changed her mind. She kicked a beer can under a car parked in the street and stopped to look at her reflection on the car door. The tiny flowers of her printed dress made her look as if she had a strange tropical disease. She spotted another can and kicked it out of the way of the car, thinking that one of these days some kid was going to fall and hurt himself. What she wanted to do she knew was kick the car out of the way. Both the station wagon and the Ford had been parked in front of her house all week, waiting. Everybody was just sitting around waiting.

Suddenly she laughed aloud. Reverend Davis' car was big and black and shiny just like, but no, the smile disappeared from her face, her mother didn't like for them to say things about other people's color. She looked around to see who else came, and saw Mr. Moore's old beat up blue car. Somebody had torn away half of his NAACP sign. Sometimes she really felt sorry for the man. No matter how hard he glued on his stickers somebody always yanked them off again.

Ellie didn’t recognize the third car but it had an Alabama license plate. She turned around and looked up and down the street, hating to go inside. There were no lights on their street, but in the distance she could see the bright lights of the parking lot. Slowly she did an about face and climbed the steps.

She wondered when her mama was going to remember to get a yellow bulb for the porch. Although the lights hadn’t been turned on, usually June bugs and mosquitoes swarmed all around the porch. By the time she was inside the house she always felt like they were crawling in her hair. She pulled on the screen and saw that Mama finally had made Hezekiah patch up the holes. The globs of white adhesive tape scattered over the screen door looked just like misshapen butterflies.

She listened to her father’s voice and could tell by the tone that the men were discussing something important again. She rattled the door once more but nobody came.

“Will somebody please let me in?” Her voice carried through the screen to the knot of men sitting in the corner.

“The door’s open,” her father yelled. “Come on in.”

“The door is not open,” she said evenly. “You know we stopped leaving it open.” She was feeling tired again and her voice had fallen an octave lower.

“Yeah, I forgot, I forgot,” he mumbled walking to the door.

She watched her father almost stumble across a chair to let her in. He was shorter than the light bulb and the light seemed to beam down on him, emphasizing the wrinkles around his eyes. She could tell from the way he pushed open the screen that he hadn’t had much sleep either. She’d overheard him telling Mama that the people down at the shop seemed to be piling on the work harder just because of this thing. And he couldn’t do anything or say anything to his boss because they probably wanted to fire him.

“Where’s Mama?” she whispered. He nodded toward the back.

“Good evening, everybody,” she said looking at the three men who had not looked up since she had entered the room. One of the men half stood, but his attention was geared back to something another man was saying. They were sitting on the sofa in their shirt sleeves and there was a pitcher of ice water on the window sill.

“Your mother probably needs some help,” her father said. She looked past him trying to figure out who the white man was sitting on the end. His face looked familiar and she tried to remember where she had seen him before. The men were paying no attention to her. She bent to see what they were studying and saw a large sheet of white drawing paper. She could see blocks and lines and the man sitting in the middle was marking a trail with the eraser edge of the pencil.

The quiet stillness of the room was making her head ache more. She pushed her way through the red embroidered curtains that led to the kitchen.

"I'm home, Mama," she said, standing in front of the back door facing the big yellow sun Hezekiah and Tommy had painted on the wall above the iron stove. Immediately she felt a warmth permeating her skin. "Where is everybody?" she asked, sitting at the table where her mother was peeling potatoes.

"Mrs. McAllister is keeping Helen and Teenie," her mother said. "Your brother is staying over with Harry tonight." With each name she uttered, a slice of potato peeling tumbled to the newspaper on the table. "Tommy's in the bedroom reading that Uncle Wiggily book."

Ellie looked up at her mother but her eyes were straight ahead. She knew that Tommy only read the Uncle Wiggily book by himself when he was unhappy. She got up and walked to the kitchen cabinet.

"The other knives dirty?" she asked.

"No," her mother said, "look in the next drawer."

Ellie pulled open the drawer, flicking scraps of white paint with her fingernail. She reached for the knife and at the same time a pile of envelopes caught her eye.

"Any more come today?" she asked, pulling out the knife and slipping the envelopes under the dish towels.

"Yes, seven more came today," her mother accentuated each word carefully. "Your father has them with him in the other room."

"Same thing?" she asked picking up a potato and wishing she could think of some way to change the subject.

The white people had been threatening them for the past three weeks. Some of the letters were aimed at the family, but most of them were directed to Tommy himself. About once a week in the same handwriting somebody wrote that he'd better not eat lunch at school because they were going to poison him.

They had been getting those letters ever since the school board made Tommy's name public. She sliced the potato and dropped the pieces in the pan of cold water. Out of all those people he had been the only one the board had accepted for transfer to the elementary school. The other children, the members said, didn't live in the district. As she cut the eyes out of another potato she thought about the first letter they had received and how her father just set fire to it in the ashtray. But then Mr. Bell said they'd better save the rest, in case anything happened, they might need the evidence for court.

She peeped up again at her mother, "Who's that white man in there with Daddy?"

"One of Lawyer Belk's friends," she answered. "He's pastor of the church that's always on television Sunday morning. Mr. Belk seems to think that having him around will do some good." Ellie saw that her voice was shaking just like her hand as she reached for the last potato. Both of them could hear Tommy in the next room mumbling to himself. She was afraid to look at her mother.

Suddenly Ellie was aware that her mother's hands were trembling violently. "He's so little," she whispered and suddenly the knife slipped out of her hands and she was crying and breathing at the same time.

Ellie didn't know what to do but after a few seconds she cleared away the peelings and put the knives in the sink. "Why don't you lie down?" she suggested. "I'll clean up and get Tommy in bed." Without saying anything her mother rose and walked to her bedroom.

Ellie wiped off the table and draped the dishcloth over the sink. She stood back and looked at the rusting pipes powdered with a whitish film. One of these days they would have to paint the place. She tiptoed past her mother who looked as if she had fallen asleep from exhaustion.

"Tommy," she called softly, "come on and get ready for bed."

Tommy sitting in the middle of the floor did not answer. He was sitting the way she imagined he would be, cross-legged, pulling his ear lobe as he turned the ragged pages of *Uncle Wiggily at the Zoo*.

"What you doing, Tommy?" she said, squatting on the floor beside him. He smiled and pointed at the picture of the ducks.

"School starts tomorrow," she said, turning a page with him. "Don't you think it's time to go to bed?"

"Oh Ellie, do I have to go now?" She looked down at the serious brown eyes and the closely cropped hair. For a minute she wondered if he questioned having to go to bed now or to school tomorrow.

"Well," she said, "aren't you about through with the book?" He shook his head. "Come on," she pulled him up, "you're a sleepy head." Still he shook his head.

"When Helen and Teenie coming home?"

"Tomorrow after you come home from school they'll be here."

She lifted him from the floor, thinking how small he looked to be facing all those people tomorrow.

"Look," he said, breaking away from her hand and pointing to a blue shirt and a pair of cotton twill pants, "Mama got them for me to wear tomorrow."

While she ran water in the tub, she heard him crawl on top of the bed. He was quiet and she knew he was untying his sneakers.

"Put your shoes out," she called through the door, "and maybe Daddy will polish them."

"Is Daddy still in there with those men? Mama made me be quiet so I wouldn't bother them."

He padded into the bathroom with bare feet and crawled into the water. As she scrubbed him they played Ask Me A Question, their own version of Twenty Questions. She had just dried him and was about to have him step into his pajamas when he asked: "Are they gonna get me tomorrow?"

"Who's going to get you?" She looked into his eyes and began rubbing him furiously with the towel.

"I don't know," he answered. "Somebody I guess."

"Nobody's going to get you," she said, "who wants a little boy who gets bubblegum in his hair anyway—but us?" He grinned but as she hugged him she thought how much he looked like his father. They walked to the bed to say his prayers and while they were kneeling she heard the first drops of rain. By the time she covered him up and tucked the spread off the floor the rain had changed to a steady downpour.

When Tommy had gone to bed her mother got up again and began ironing clothes in the kitchen. Something, she said, to keep her thoughts busy. While her mother folded and sorted the clothes Ellie drew up a chair from the kitchen table. They sat in the kitchen for a while listening to the voices of the men in the next room. Her mother's quiet speech broke the stillness in the room.

"I'd rather," she said, making sweeping motions with the iron, "that you stayed home from work tomorrow and went with your father to take Tommy. I don't think I'll be up to those people."

Ellie nodded, "I don't mind," she said, tracing circles on the oilcloth covered table.

"Your father's going," her mother continued. "Belk and Reverend Davis are too. I think that white man in there will probably go."

“They may not need me,” Ellie answered.

“Tommy will,” her mother said, folding the last dish towel and storing it in the cabinet.

“Mama, I think he’s scared,” the girl turned toward the woman. “He was so quiet while I was washing him.”

“I know,” she answered, sitting down heavily. “He’s been that way all day.” Her brown wavy hair glowed in the dim lighting of the kitchen. “I told him he wasn’t going to school with Jakie and Bob anymore but I said he was going to meet some other children just as nice.”

Ellie saw that her mother was twisting her wedding band around and around on her finger.

“I’ve already told Mrs. Ingraham that I wouldn’t be able to come out tomorrow.” Ellie paused, “She didn’t say very much. She didn’t even say anything about his pictures in the newspaper. Mr. Ingraham said we were getting right crazy but even he didn’t say anything else.”

She stopped to look at the clock sitting near the sink. “It’s almost time for the cruise cars to begin,” she said. Her mother followed Ellie’s eyes to the sink. The policemen circling their block every twenty minutes was supposed to make them feel safe, but hearing the cars come so regularly and that light flashing through the shade above her bed only made her nervous.

She stopped talking to push a wrinkle out of the shiny red cloth, dragging her finger along the table edges. “How long before those men going to leave?” she asked her mother. Just as she spoke she heard one of the men say something about getting some sleep. “I didn’t mean to run them away,” she said, smiling. Her mother half-smiled too. They listened for the sound of motors and tires and waited for her father to shut the front door.

In a few seconds her father’s head pushed through the curtain. “Want me to turn down your bed now, Ellie?” She felt uncomfortable staring up at him, the whole family looked drained of all energy.

“That’s all right,” she answered. “I’ll sleep in Helen and Teenie’s bed tonight.”

“How’s Tommy?” he asked looking toward the bedroom. He came in and sat down at the table with them.

They were silent before he spoke. “I keep wondering if we should send him.” He lit a match and watched the flame disappear into the ashtray, then he looked into his wife’s eyes. “There’s no telling what these fool white folks will do.”

Her mother reached over and patted his hand. "We're doing what we have to do, I guess," she said. "Sometimes though I wish the others weren't so much older than him."

"But it seems so unfair," Ellie broke in, "sending him there all by himself like that. Everybody keeps asking me why the MacAdams didn't apply for their children."

"Eloise." Her father's voice sounded curt. "We aren't answering for the MacAdams, we're trying to do what's right for your brother. He's not old enough to have his own say. You and the others could decide for yourselves, but we're the ones that have to do for him."

She didn't say anything but watched him pull a handful of envelopes out of his pocket and tuck them in the cabinet drawer. She knew that if anyone had told him in August that Tommy would be the only one going to Jefferson Davis[41] they would not have let him go.

"Those the new ones?" she asked. "What they say?"

"Let's not talk about the letters," her father said. "Let's go to bed."

Outside they heard the rain become heavier. Since early evening she had become accustomed to the sound. Now it blended in with the rest of the noises that had accumulated in the back of her mind since the whole thing began.

As her mother folded the ironing board they heard the quiet wheels of the police car. Ellie noticed that the clock said twelve-ten and she wondered why they were early. Her mother pulled the iron cord from the switch and they stood silently waiting for the police car to turn around and pass the house again, as if the car's passing were a final blessing for the night.

Suddenly she was aware of a noise that sounded as if everything had broken loose in her head at once, a loudness that almost shook the foundation of the house. At the same time the lights went out and instinctively her father knocked them to the floor. They could hear the tinkling of glass near the front of the house and Tommy began screaming.

"Tommy, get down," her father yelled.

She hoped he would remember to roll under the bed the way they had practiced. She was aware of objects falling and breaking as she lay perfectly still. Her breath was coming in jerks and then there was a second noise, a smaller explosion but still drowning out Tommy's cries.

"Stay still," her father commanded. "I'm going to check on Tommy. They may throw another one."

[41] *Jefferson Davis (1808–89) was the president of the Confederacy during the Civil War. Many elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the South have been named after him.*

She watched him crawl across the floor, pushing a broken flower vase and an iron skillet out of his way. All of the sounds, Tommy’s crying, the breaking glass, everything was echoing in her ears. She felt as if they had been crouching on the floor for hours but when she heard the police car door slam, the luminous hands of the clock said only twelve-fifteen.

She heard other cars drive up and pairs of heavy feet trample on the porch. “You folks all right in there?”

She could visualize the hands pulling open the door, because she knew the voice. Sergeant Kearns had been responsible for patrolling the house during the past three weeks. She heard him click the light switch in the living room but the darkness remained intense.

Her father deposited Tommy in his wife’s lap and went to what was left of the door. In the next fifteen minutes policemen were everywhere. While she rummaged around underneath the cabinet for a candle, her mother tried to hush up Tommy. His cheek was cut where he had scratched himself on the springs of the bed. Her mother motioned for her to dampen a cloth and put some petroleum jelly on it to keep him quiet. She tried to put him to bed again but he would not go, even when she promised to stay with him for the rest of the night. And so she sat in the kitchen rocking the little boy back and forth on her lap.

Ellie wandered around the kitchen but the light from the single candle put an eerie glow on the walls making her nervous. She began picking up pans, stepping over pieces of broken crockery and glassware. She did not want to go into the living room yet, but if she listened closely, snatches of the policemen’s conversation came through the curtain.

She heard one man say that the bomb landed near the edge of the yard, that was why it had only gotten the front porch. She knew from their talk that the living room window was shattered completely. Suddenly Ellie sat down. The picture of the living room window kept flashing in her mind and a wave of feeling invaded her body making her shake as if she had lost all muscular control. She slept on the couch, right under that window.

She looked at her mother to see if she too had realized, but her mother was looking down at Tommy and trying to get him to close his eyes. Ellie stood up and crept toward the living room trying to prepare herself for what she would see. Even that minute of determination could not make her control the horror that she felt. There were jagged holes all along the front of the house and the sofa was covered with glass and paint. She started to pick up the picture that had toppled from the book shelf, then she just stepped over the broken frame.

Outside her father was talking and, curious to see who else was with him, she walked across the splinters to the yard. She could see pieces of the geranium pot and the red blossoms turned face down. There were no lights in the other houses on the street. Across

from their house she could see forms standing in the door and shadows being pushed back and forth. "I guess the MacAdams are glad they just didn't get involved." No one heard her speak, and no one came over to see if they could help; she knew why and did not really blame them. They were afraid their house could be next.

Most of the policemen had gone now and only one car was left to flash the revolving red light in the rain. She heard the tall skinny man tell her father they would be parked outside for the rest of the night. As she watched the reflection of the police cars returning to the station, feeling sick on her stomach, she wondered now why they bothered.

Ellie went back inside the house and closed the curtain behind her. There was nothing anyone could do now, not even to the house. Everything was scattered all over the floor and poor Tommy still would not go to sleep. She wondered what would happen when the news spread through their section of town, and at once remembered the man in the grey Chevrolet. It would serve them right if her father's friends got one of them.

Ellie pulled up an overturned chair and sat down across from her mother who was crooning to Tommy. What Mr. Paul said was right, white people just couldn't be trusted. Her family had expected anything but even though they had practiced ducking, they didn't really expect anybody to try tearing down the house. But the funny thing was the house belonged to one of them. Maybe it was a good thing her family were just renters.

Exhausted, Ellie put her head down on the table. She didn't know what they were going to do about tomorrow, in the day time they didn't need electricity. She was too tired to think any more about Tommy, yet she could not go to sleep. So, she sat at the table trying to sit still, but every few minutes she would involuntarily twitch. She tried to steady her hands, all the time listening to her mother's sing-songy voice and waiting for her father to come back inside the house.

She didn't know how long she lay hunched against the kitchen table, but when she looked up, her wrists bore the imprints of her hair. She unfolded her arms gingerly, feeling the blood rush to her fingertips. Her father sat in the chair opposite her, staring at the vacant space between them. She heard her mother creep away from the table, taking Tommy to his room.

Ellie looked out the window. The darkness was turning to grey and the hurt feeling was disappearing. As she sat there she could begin to look at the kitchen matter-of-factly. Although the hands of the clock were just a little past five-thirty, she knew somebody was going to have to start clearing up and cook breakfast.

She stood and tipped across the kitchen to her parents' bedroom. "Mama," she whispered, standing near the door of Tommy's room. At the sound of her voice, Tommy made a funny throaty noise in his sleep. Her mother motioned for her to go out and be quiet. Ellie knew then that Tommy had just fallen asleep. She crept back to the kitchen and began picking up the dishes that could be salvaged, being careful not to go into the living room.

She walked around her father, leaving the broken glass underneath the kitchen table. “You want some coffee?” she asked.

He nodded silently, in strange contrast she thought to the water faucet that turned with a loud gurgling noise. While she let the water run to get hot she measured out the instant coffee in one of the plastic cups. Next door she could hear people moving around in the Williams’ kitchen, but they too seemed much quieter than usual.

“You reckon everybody knows by now?” she asked, stirring the coffee and putting the saucer in front of him.

“Everybody will know by the time the city paper comes out,” he said. “Somebody was here last night from the *Observer*. Guess it’ll make front page.”

She leaned against the cabinet for support watching him trace endless circles in the brown liquid with the spoon. “Sergeant Kearns says they’ll have almost the whole force out there tomorrow,” he said.

“Today,” she whispered.

Her father looked at the clock and then turned his head.

“When’s your mother coming back in here?” he asked, finally picking up the cup and drinking the coffee.

“Tommy’s just off to sleep,” she answered. “I guess she’ll be in here when he’s asleep for good.”

She looked out the window of the back door at the row of tall hedges that had separated their neighborhood from the white people for as long as she remembered. While she stood there she heard her mother walk into the room. To her ears the steps seemed much slower than usual. She heard her mother stop in front of her father’s chair.

“Jim,” she said, sounding very timid, “what we going to do?” Yet as Ellie turned toward her she noticed her mother’s face was strangely calm as she looked down on her husband.

Ellie continued standing by the door, listening to them talk. Nobody asked the question to which they all wanted an answer.

“I keep thinking,” her father said finally, “that the policemen will be with him all day. They couldn’t hurt him inside the school building without getting some of their own kind.”

“But he’ll be in there all by himself,” her mother said softly. “A hundred policemen can’t be a little boy’s only friends.”

She watched her father wrap his calloused hands, still splotched with machine oil, around the salt shaker on the table.

"I keep trying," he said to her, "to tell myself that somebody's got to be the first one and then I just think how quiet he's been all week."

Ellie listened to the quiet voices that seemed to be a room apart from her. In the back of her mind she could hear phrases of a hymn her grandmother used to sing, something about trouble, her being born for trouble.

"Jim, I cannot let my baby go." Her mother's words, although quiet, were carefully pronounced.

"Maybe," her father answered, "it's not in our hands. Reverend Davis and I were talking day before yesterday how God tested the Israelites, maybe he's just trying us."

"God expects you to take care of your own," his wife interrupted. Ellie sensed a trace of bitterness in her mother's voice.

"Tommy's not going to understand why he can't go to school," her father replied. "He's going to wonder why, and how are we going to tell him we're afraid of them?" Her father's hand clutched the coffee cup. "He's going to be fighting them the rest of his life. He's got to start sometime."

"But he's not on their level. Tommy's too little to go around hating people. One of the others, they're bigger, they understand about things."

Ellie still leaning against the door saw that the sun covered part of the sky behind the hedges, and the light slipping through the kitchen window seemed to reflect the shiny red of the table cloth.

"He's our child," she heard her mother say. "Whatever we do, we're going to be the cause." Her father had pushed the cup away from him and sat with his hands covering part of his face. Outside Ellie could hear a horn blowing.

"God knows we tried but I guess there's just no use." Her father's voice forced her attention back to the two people sitting in front of her. "Maybe when things come back to normal, we'll try again."

He covered his wife's chunky fingers with the palm of his hand and her mother seemed to be enveloped in silence. The three of them remained quiet, each involved in his own thoughts, but related, Ellie knew, to the same thing. She was the first to break the silence.

"Mama," she called after a long pause, "do you want me to start setting the table for breakfast?"

Her mother nodded.

Ellie turned the clock so she could see it from the sink while she washed the dishes that had been scattered over the floor.

“You going to wake up Tommy or you want me to?”

“No,” her mother said, still holding her father’s hand, “let him sleep. When you wash your face, you go up the street and call Hezekiah. Tell him to keep up with the children after school, I want to do something to this house before they come home.”

She stopped talking and looked around the kitchen, finally turning to her husband. “He’s probably kicked the spread off by now,” she said. Ellie watched her father, who without saying anything walked toward the bedroom.

She watched her mother lift herself from the chair and automatically push in the stuffing underneath the cracked plastic cover. Her face looked set, as it always did when she was trying hard to keep her composure.

“He’ll need something hot when he wakes up. Hand me the oatmeal,” she commanded, reaching on top of the icebox for matches to light the kitchen stove.

Letter to the *Orlando Sentinel*

ZORA NEALE HURSTON

Integration of the public schools, required by the US Supreme Court's decision in Brown v. Board of Education, *was adamantly—often violently—opposed by many southern whites. But a few prominent blacks also took a dim view of forced racial integration. In this letter to the* Orlando Sentinel, *written on August 11, 1955 from her home in Eau Gallie, Florida, distinguished author and educator Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960) offers a witty but biting critique of the court's decision, in the name of "the self-respect of my people." In a strong and proud voice, she rejects "the 'tragedy of color' school of thought," emphasizing "growth from within" (as opposed to legislation from without) and educational quality and excellence (rather than integration and low-level equality). Why does Hurston believe that forced integration is demeaning to* blacks*? Does she successfully defend herself against a charge that she is one of the "handkerchief-head-niggers . . . who sell out my own people out of cowardice"? What is the point of her tale of the "white mare"? Why is she worried by the rise of "Govt by fiat"? Could Hurston be right in thinking that integration by administrative decree could be bad for personal growth and educational excellence? Is integration really an unreasonable goal of a Civil Rights Movement?*

Editor:

I promised God and some other responsible characters, including a bench of bishops, that I was not going to part my lips concerning the U.S. Supreme Court decision on ending segregation in the public schools of the South. But since a lot of time has passed and no one seems to touch on what to me appears to be the most important point in the hassle, I break my silence just this once. Consider me as just thinking out loud.

The whole matter revolves around the self-respect of my people. How much satisfaction can I get from a court order for somebody to associate with me who does not wish me near them? The American Indian has never been spoken of as a minority and chiefly because there is no whine in the Indian. Certainly he fought, and valiantly for his lands, and rightfully so, but it is inconceivable of an Indian to seek forcible association with anyone. His well-known pride and self-respect would save him from that. I take the Indian position.

Now a great clamor will arise in certain quarters that I seek to deny the Negro children of the South their rights, and therefore I am one of those "handkerchief-head niggers" who bow low before the white man and sell out my own people out of cowardice. However an analytical glance will show that that is not the case.

If there are not adequate Negro schools in Florida, and there is some residual, some inherent and unchangeable quality in white schools, impossible to duplicate anywhere else, then I am the first to insist that Negro children of Florida be allowed to share this

boon. But if there are adequate Negro schools and prepared instructors and instructions, then there is nothing different except the presence of white people.

For this reason, I regard the ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court as insulting rather than honoring my race. Since the days of the never-to-be-sufficiently deplored Reconstruction, there has been current the belief that there is no great[er] delight to Negroes than physical association with whites. The doctrine of the white mare. Those familiar with the habits of mules are aware that any mule, if not restrained, will automatically follow a white mare. Dishonest mule-traders made money out of this knowledge in the old days.

Lead a white mare along a country road and slyly open the gate and the mules in the lot would run out and follow this mare. This ruling being conceived and brought forth in a sly political medium with eyes on ’56, and brought forth in the same spirit and for the same purpose, it is clear that they have taken the old notion to heart and acted upon it. It is a cunning opening of the barnyard gate wit[h] the white mare ambling past. We are expected to hasten pell-mell after her.

It is most astonishing that this should be tried just when the nation is exerting itself to shake off the evils of Communist penetration. It is to be recalled that Moscow, being made aware of this folk belief, made it the main plank in their campaign to win the American Negro from the 1920’s on. It was the come-on stuff. Join the party and get yourself a white wife or husband. To supply the expected demand, the party had scraped up this-and-that off of park benches and skid rows and held them in stock for us. The highest types of Negroes were held to be just panting to get hold of one of these objects. Seeing how flat that program fell, it is astonishing that it would be so soon revived. Politics does indeed make strange bedfellows.

But the South had better beware in another direction. While it is being frantic over the segregation ruling, it had better keep its eyes open for more important things. One instance of Govt by fiat has been rammed down its throat. It is possible that the end of segregation is not here and never meant to be here at present, but the attention of the South directed on what was calculated to keep us busy while more ominous things were brought to pass. The stubborn South and the Midwest kept this nation from being dragged farther to the left than it was during the New Deal.

But what if it is contemplated to do away with the two-party system and arrive at Govt by administrative decree? No questions allowed and no information given out from the administrative dept? We could get more rulings on the same subject and more far-reaching any day. It pays to weigh every saving and action, however trivial as indicating a trend.

In the ruling on segregation, the unsuspecting nation might have witnessed a trial-balloon. A relatively safe one, since it is sectional and on a matter not likely to arouse other sections of the nation to the support of the South. If it goes off fairly well, a precedent has been established. Govt by fiat can replace the Constitution. You don’t have

to credit me with too much intelligence and penetration, just so you watch carefully and think.

Meanwhile, personally, I am not delighted. I am not persuaded and elevated by the white mare technique. Negro schools in the state are in very good shape and on the improve. We are fortunate in having Dr. D.E. Williams as head and driving force of Negro instruction. Dr. Williams is relentless in his drive to improve both physical equipment and teacher-quality. He has accomplished wonder[s] in the 20 years past and it is to be expected that he will double that in the future.

It is well known that I have no sympathy nor respect for the 'tragedy of color' school of thought among us, whose fountain-head is the pressure group concerned in this court ruling. I can see no tragedy in being too dark to be invited to a white school social affair. The Supreme Court would have pleased me more if they had concerned themselves about enforcing the compulsory education provisions for Negroes in the South as is done for white children. The next 10 years would be better spent in appointing truant officers and looking after conditions in the homes from which the children come. Use to the limit what we already have.

Thems my sentiments and I am sticking by them. Growth from within. Ethical and cultural desegregation. It is a contradiction in terms to scream race pride and equality while at the same time spurning Negro teachers and self-association. That old white mare business can go racking on down the road for all I care.

Zora Neale Hurston
Eau Gallie

Eulogy for the Martyred Children

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

On September 15, 1963, less than three weeks after King delivered his stirring "I Have a Dream" speech before the Lincoln Memorial at the Great March on Washington, four young girls were killed in the bombing of Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Three days later, King delivered this eulogy at the funeral service for three of the children—Addie Mae Collins (age 14), Denise McNair, (age 11) and Cynthia Diane Wesley (age 14). A separate service was held for the fourth victim, Carole Robertson (age 14). Along with "The Great March," this bombing is said to have marked a turning point in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, garnering much needed support for the passage of the Civil Rights Act the following year. This eulogy shows another aspect of King's leadership. It also offers another view of the way he links American political and Christian religious ideas.[42]

In his eulogy, King asserts that although the children were "unoffending, innocent, and beautiful . . . victims" they were also "martyred heroines of a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity" who "died nobly." Can you make sense of this claim? What principles, American or Christian, could make the campaign for civil rights a "holy crusade"? The bombing of the church was known at the time to have been an act of racial terrorism, perpetrated by a group associated with the Ku Klux Klan. Yet King does not blame or rage against the perpetrators, but instead finds fault with, among others, "every minister of the gospel who has remained silent" and "every Negro who has passively accepted the evil system of segregation." Why does he shift the focus of blame? King then says that these young girls "did not die in vain," and invites us to think that their "unmerited suffering is redemptive." What does this mean? In concluding, King offers direct consolation to the bereaved families. Imagining yourself as one among them, would you be consoled by his words?

This afternoon we gather in the quiet of this sanctuary to pay our last tribute of respect to these beautiful children of God. They entered the stage of history just a few years ago, and in the brief years that they were privileged to act on this mortal stage, they played their parts exceedingly well. Now the curtain falls; they move through the exit; the drama of their earthly life comes to a close. They are now committed back to that eternity from which they came.

Read the eulogy here: http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/kingpapers/article/eulogy_for_the_martyred_children/.

[42] *To listen to a recording of King's eulogy, see http://vimeo.com/34762047.*

Letter on the Civil Rights Movement

LEON R. KASS

In the summer of 1965, while the Voting Rights Act was being enacted, the editors of this volume, Amy Apfel Kass (b. 1940; then a high school history teacher in Lincoln-Sudbury, Massachusetts) and her husband Leon R. Kass (b. 1939; then a graduate student in biochemistry at Harvard University) spent a month in Mississippi doing civil rights work. They lived with a farmer couple in the Mount Olive community of rural Holmes County, in a house with no telephone, hot water, or indoor toilet. They visited many families in the community, participated in their activities, and helped with voter registration and other efforts to encourage the people to organize themselves in defense of their rights. In November of that year, Leon wrote a long letter, sent individually to many family members and friends, describing what they had learned and urging people to donate to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, the fledgling organization that was building for the first time a significant indigenous political, and not just protest, movement in the state. The letter bears personal witness to the necessity of such a local political movement, the concrete obstacles that stood in its way, and the spirit of hope that its emergence was generating.

The letter seems to imply that the sheriff and the cotton-acreage allotter were more important for the day-to-day life of black Mississippians than their congressmen and senators in Washington. What can be said for and against that view? What, according to this letter, were the most urgent and important goals for the Movement, and how might they best be achieved? Is Kass right when he says, near the end, that "even a guaranteed failure should not dissuade us from the necessity of the battle"? Imagining yourself in receipt of such a letter, how would you have responded?

During this past summer, Amy and I spent a month in Holmes County, Mississippi. We went down to do "community organization" under the auspices of the Medical Community for Human Rights, but found ourselves of necessity and also by choice working closely with the Holmes County branch of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). Since returning to the North, we have been confronted with questions (fewer than I would have hoped for), most inquiring "what did *you* do?", "what did *you* accomplish?", "were *you* beaten up or threatened?" We were troubled by these questions, since they revealed a lack of awareness of the indigenous nature of The Movement and also revealed a lack of identification with the people who are The Movement. We find this lack of identification particularly disturbing because we feel that our fate, indeed, the fate and viability of all that is potentially good in our society, is inextricably bound to the fate of the Mississippi Negro. He is fighting *our* battle as much as he is fighting his own, more than we are fighting his. At the risk of offending those of you already involved and identified, we would like to offer observations out of our personal experience in the hope that you may more clearly see The Movement and its obstacles, and especially your own relationship to it.

Although intimidation through violence remains crucial to the white Southerner's domination of the Negro, the real stranglehold is fundamentally economic: the Negro, in his present unorganized condition, is at the mercy of the white community for even the sub-subsistence living he ekes out. Economic blackmail is often threatened, often carried out against Negroes who try to assert their political rights. In Holmes County, there are many so-called "independent farmers," owners of their own land, who are nevertheless completely at the mercy of the white bankers and loan companies. Almost all of them are in debt to such loan companies, having borrowed to pay for the land or their house, to tide them over the winter and spring when income is lacking, to pay for a second-hand tractor or team of horses, etc. The interest rates are fantastic, the monthly payments outrageously high, guaranteeing that no one will be able to keep up with the payments. One man, earning an annual income of about $900, bought a house and the lot on which it stood for $800, with a verbal agreement that the payments would be $25 per month. However, this amount was not written into the contract he was told to sign; when the contract was returned to him, it called for complete payment of $1,680 in two years, in monthly installments of $70. (Note the interest of $880 on an $800 loan—a usurer's rate of 55% per year.) When this man tried to register to vote, the loan company threatened to foreclose on him. (The names of Negroes who register to vote are printed in the weekly newspaper, exposing them for reprisals.) Of course, the company is within its rights since the man is behind in his payments. He elected to forego registration. Housefuls of furniture, even houses and farms are demanded as collateral for even a $25–$50 loan. Foreclosure is always effective, since the Sheriff, for a small percentage of the take, serves as the collection agency. If the person borrowing has been active in The Movement, you can be sure that the Sheriff will be at his door on the day the note is due.

Why do the "independent farmers" have to borrow? They wouldn't if the cotton acreage allotments were justly distributed. Each county receives a share of the state's cotton allotment, which the all-white county officials distribute to the individual farmers. It is not accidental that white farmers are permitted up to 150 acres of cotton on a 200-acre farm, whereas Negro farmer owning 200 acres is granted only 5–8 acres in cotton. The inspectors who check for "overplanting" are notoriously discriminatory. If they claim that a farmer has planted more than his allotment (even if they are mistaken), the farmer must plow up the extra acreage at his own expense, and in addition, pay a fine to the county office. These inspectors have been known to use short measuring chains when measuring Negro farms, longer chains when inspecting white farms. It is a rare person who will go to the county office and claim that he has been cheated by the inspectors. Since cotton is the only cash crop, the procedures of under-allotment and over-inspection guarantee that the Negro farmer will always be in the red. In our community, only two out of several hundred Negro farmers said that they did not need larger cotton allotments merely to break even; the rest were forced to borrow.

I should emphasize that the cotton distribution is a Federal program handled by the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) of the Dept. of Agriculture. All the inspectors and county officials mentioned above are federal employees. Even the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has not moved the Dept. of Agriculture to eliminate the discrimination in its own programs. Numerous complaints have been filed; the Dept. of

Agriculture cannot plead ignorance for its inaction. Last year, The Movement organized Negro farmers to put up local candidates for the ASCS offices (an essential move, it seems to me; if Negros are ever to get a fair share of the cotton allotments, they will have to do the allotting). The white officials gerrymandered the ASCS districts, kept most of the Negro candidates off the ballot, and intimidated and harassed Negro farmers who turned out to vote. (Despite all this, one Negro was elected in Holmes County.) The Dept. of Agriculture did not even investigate the complaints filed.

By comparison with other Negroes, however, the independent farmer is well off. Most of the Holmes County Negroes work as day-laborers on the white plantations (for $2.50 to $3 for a ten-hour day) or as domestics in white homes (for $10 to $15 for a six-day week). Why do they work for such outrageous wages? Because $2.50 a day is better than nothing. In some areas, including Senator Eastland's plantation, the plantation workers have organized their own strikes, but these have been largely unsuccessful thus far. The many Negroes on welfare are still poorer and even more vulnerable. The state of Mississippi refuses its fair share of the Federal Welfare program; therefore, the services provided are inadequate, and those provided for are but a small number of those qualified to receive welfare. Needless to say, there is rank discrimination in the administration of funds and services, particularly against those Negroes active in The Movement. People have been dropped from Old Age Assistance for attempting to register to vote; Federally-supplied food surpluses have been withheld from people participating in a demonstration. It is not easy for someone to decide that a vote is more important than the food provided to keep his kids from starving.

Health services for Negroes are truly unbelievable. The eight white doctors in Holmes County all have segregated waiting rooms, and all of them empty the white waiting room *completely* before seeing *one* Negro patient. A visit to the doctor for a Negro takes literally all day, the first seven or eight hours of which are spent in the waiting room. (The one physician who committed the crime of taking Negro and white patients in the order of arrival was run out of the county, first by threats of violence, finally by a police barricade of the two roads leading to his office.) State-supported Public Health Clinics ("state-supported" means that only 80 cents of each dollar is supplied by the Federal government in direct aid to the state health program) offer prenatal care and also immunizations for children. In one such clinic in Holmes County, the women are forced to undress out-of-doors; the clinic has no toilets or running water. The County Hospital demands a $50 down-payment before a patient can be admitted (a practice not foreign to Northern *private* hospitals). Negro patients are prevented from leaving the hospital until the entire bill is paid; in such cases, the patient remains in his bed, the bill mounting from day to day. In maternity cases, an exception is often made: the mother is permitted to go home, but the baby is kept as a hostage until the bill is fully paid. The hospital has segregated wards, which are of course of unequal quality. The Negro wards are staffed largely by poorly trained Negro personnel. When asked if this staff assignment did not mean that Negroes got inferior treatment, the hospital administrator replied: "The Negro help are less hygienic, and the Negro patients don't mind." In order to avoid compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the County Hospital is now refusing to accept patients on welfare, thus avoiding any overt contact with Federal money. In view of these

conditions, it is no wonder that many Negroes will not even seek medical aid: many would sooner die at home, in dignity.

Education is another facet of the same story. The elementary school in our community was a crumbling frame building, built during Reconstruction. "Teaching," during the winter, consists of sending children out to gather firewood. No Negro school in this county has a library. Books come to these schools only after the white schools finish with them. (No Negro is permitted to *enter* the County *Public* Library; arrests have followed attempts to do so.) The Negro "high schools" are known as Attendance Centers rather than as high schools. The inference is quite clear: the *best* one can expect from a Negro is that he will show up; therefore, attendance should be rewarded. The Attendance Centers are not accredited; graduates can attend college *only* in the state of Mississippi. The teachers in the Negro schools are by and large poorly trained. Afraid for their jobs (they make the highest salaries in the community, at about $2,000 to $2,500 per year), threatened and intimidated by the school board, they have remained outside The Movement. Less than ten percent of the Negro schoolteachers have registered to vote.

The official harassments by the Law are much more prevalent and insidious than the few publicized murders and beatings would suggest. The white society extends its powers into the smallest aspects of daily life. It is in these areas where one can really appreciate the call for "Freedom Now." A Negro runs the risk of arrest or worse merely by walking down the main street of town, especially at night. One man in Lexington, the county seat, was shot by a policeman following a casual remark made while witnessing the arrest of another man. People we knew well and who were friendly to us in the privacy of their own homes were afraid to say hello to us on the streets in Lexington. A Negro lacks the right of privacy in his own home; he has not the freedom to refuse entry to any white man, from sheriffs to salesmen. The state had prepared two official written tests for people seeking driver's licenses: a short test for whites and "good" Negroes, a longer test for Movement people. This latter test demands verbatim quotations of long sections of traffic ordinances; spelling mistakes lead to failure. Thus a significant number of Negroes drive without licenses, a fact known to and tolerated by the Law until such time when it becomes convenient to put pressure on these people.

Roads in the Negro sections of Lexington are unpaved and lack street lights. Following complaints, the city fathers, concerned about the image of their town, decided that all streets in the city should be paved and lit. Immediately afterwards, they altered the city limits to place the Negro sections out of town.

In the eyes of the local Justices of the Peace, all interracial traffic accidents are the fault of the Negro, unless the white person is an outside agitator.

Two years ago, the people of our community petitioned Southern Bell Telephone Company to have telephones installed. There are several hundred families in the area, almost all are Negro. Telephone lines were put up, but phones were given *only* to whites. The nearest public telephone is fifteen miles away.

Fear of violence is always present, even if unexpressed. Violence takes many forms, most of them insufficiently sensational to make the Northern newspapers (most of the sensational cases reported murders of Northern whites; brutalization of local Negroes is largely unreported). Homes are firebombed, cars booby-trapped, etc. Just last week, nightriders shot into the home of a Holmes County family that had sent two children to the recently desegregated school, injuring the woman of the house. The husband returned the gunfire, and was subsequently arrested by the sheriff and kept in jail overnight without formally being charged. Such incidents have been more frequent of late due to the order for school desegregation (despite the fact that all the white children originally enrolled in the desegregated schools have now been withdrawn, many under threats of violence from the same white rednecks). Should the Negro ever wish to relax his guard, the community won't let him. One incident will illustrate. An insurance salesman, riding through the shack-dotted country hills in his air-conditioned car, stopped at the house where we were staying. He unsuccessfully tried to sell our host fire insurance on his house. It took little genius to appreciate his parting message: "Well, if your house burns down *tonight*, tomorrow you'll be sorry you didn't have fire insurance." Making the same point, he sold a policy to the people down the road. It is a difficult rhetoric to resist. Paranoia is a necessity for survival.

Given this pervasive system of oppression, it is perhaps of some surprise that the Mississippi Negro was not yet mounted the barricades. The reason is clear: *anger* has been an unacceptable response for a Negro. Not too long ago, it resulted in his hanging from a tree. Today's methods of preventing an outcry are slightly more subtle and almost as effective. The economic chain strangles almost as well as the ordinary braided rope. Let no one conclude, therefore, that the Negro is pleased with his lot; he is merely cautious in expressing his dissatisfaction. This caution is without question justifiable in terms of his reality; he must overcome this caution *by himself* if that reality is to be changed. And there are signs that he is beginning to overcome his caution, his fear.

Whites in the North, ourselves included, have a difficult time understanding and working with this *apparent* lack of anger. White civil rights workers are too often overeager in pushing local people into activist roles. We often fail to remember that it is *they*, not we, who bear the brunt of the white retaliation. Would you, as Negro parents in Mississippi, send your child to the white school, running the risk of having him beaten and having your house bombed, for the sake of 'education' in a society where schooling never got a Negro anywhere? How would you react to the white summer volunteer who was pushing you to register your child at such a school? Would you not wonder if he would be so brave if he were not leaving for the North at the end of the summer?

I am not suggesting that outside civil rights workers are harmful or useless. My point is that the *major* impact on local Negroes *must* be made by other local Negroes who share the same reality, yet who have nevertheless overcome their own fears. This necessity for local political organization is the idea behind the MFDP. Started by COFO (Council of Federated Organizations) in the Summer 1964, the MFDP has become the largest civil rights group in the state. It is the *only* group in Mississippi that is engaged in community organization on a grass-roots level. In Holmes County, there are now weekly MFDP

meetings in eight separate communities involving perhaps 1,500 of the county's 19,000 Negroes (total population of Holmes is 29,000). These meetings are run largely by local people, people who before 1964 had for the most part been completely silent. The local community action projects are decided on by the local MFDP membership. Current projects include a boycott on all the discriminatory stores in Lexington, recruitment of local candidates for the upcoming ASCS election, preliminary steps to form a farming-supplies cooperative, and of course, voter registration. The MFDP meetings were an inspiration to Amy and myself, both raised on the anonymity of the big city; neither of us had seen a more exciting instance of the democratic process in operation.

The MFDP suffered a severe setback in September when the Challenge to the seating of the five Mississippi Congressmen was dismissed (see *Congressional Record* for September 17, 1965).[43] For many in the North, the MFDP *was* the Challenge, nothing more. This is not the case. The trip to Washington served a useful purpose: the Mississippians realized more clearly than ever that they cannot, should not depend on Washington to solve their problems. They returned home impressed with the need to build political power at home. Currently, the MFDP is in the process of setting up adult political education seminars throughout the state. Teachers (*i.e.*, organizers) are now being trained to teach elementary civics and politics, regulations and tactics. The goal is to involve the Mississippi Negro in the political process, to give him the know-how and the desire to exercise his political power. Without such political organization, the Voting Rights Bill will be another hollow victory.

Much ink has been spilt about the Voting Rights Bill and its presumed revolutionary effect on the South. The *New York Times* sanctimoniously proclaimed that the Federal Government had now done its job. The fact of the matter is that Federal enforcement of the Voting Rights Bill has been as shoddy, as half-hearted as in other areas relating to Civil Rights (for a good analysis, see Haywood Burns' article in *Commentary*, Sept., 1965). Of the state's 83 counties, four have had Federal registrars since August; five more have just received such registrars. For the rest, nothing. Since passage of the bill, the number of registered voters has increased from 27,000 to 57,000; 383,000 eligible Negroes remain unregistered. But despite the deficiency of the Federal authorities, the major responsibility for the success of the Voting Rights Bill rests with the people themselves. No number of Federal registrars is going to convince the Negro borrower mentioned above that "the vote" is in any way going to extricate him from the mouths of the loan sharks. These people all have relatives in Chicago and Los Angeles: they do not romanticize about the power of the vote. Only a locally-based, locally-led political party can build the community identification and political force necessary to motivate these people.

The MFDP is tackling this job. Its accomplishments in its 18 months of being have been truly amazing: accomplishments not in the sense that institutions have crumbled, but

[43] *In 1965, the MFDP led a challenge to unseat Mississippi's five congressmen on the grounds that they had been illegally elected because of discriminatory voting practices and therefore, should not sit in the House of Representatives. Read the* Congressional Record *at* http://digilib.usm.edu/cdm/ref/collection/manu/id/3649.

in the sense that people are moving, moving to help themselves. As one girl put it when I asked her if she was worried about taking over as manager of the local community center: "I'm not sure if I can do it, but, you know, before last summer, I didn't think there was *anything* I could do."

What can we in the North contribute to this movement? *The MFDP needs money, badly*. The major expenses for this program are for personnel, for staff to teach the adult education programs, to build political awareness. $15 per week would liberate a person from a plantation job and enable him to work full time for The Movement. $15 per week for four weeks means that a hundred new people can be brought into The Movement this month. Money is badly needed for other things as well. MFDP has filed a suit in Federal Court to prevent the Mississippi legislature from gerrymandering the legislative districts in its reapportionment plan. This suit costs money. MFDP plans to enter candidates in the Democratic Party primary for all five congressional seats and for Senator Eastland's seat next June. These primary fights will cost money. The voter registration drive costs money, money for paper, cars, gasoline, money for bail and for harassing traffic fines, money for emergency long-distance calls. Not very glamorous, by conventional standards, we admit. But our whole point is that the blood and guts of this movement is not 'glamorous,' but rather difficult, unsung day-to-day organizing, battling. We hope you respond to our appeal.

You may argue, as others have, that the goals of the MFDP are utopian. If it is utopian to seek a grass-roots popular base for political power, if it is utopian to try to educate people to enable them to build a more just society, then MFDP is utopian—no more utopian than our democratic principles. The charge of utopianism is irrelevant here: the stakes are so high that even a guaranteed failure should not dissuade us from the necessity of the battle. Surely we can support this battle with our dollars if the Mississippi Negro has put his life on the front line.

I apologize if my rhetoric has been offensive; please do not judge the merits of The Movement by my poor efforts to bring it to life for you. I also apologize for adding a new cause to the causes for which you now work. As men of conscience, we all support other good causes. But as men blessed with more than our share of freedom and luxury, can we honestly say we cannot do more?

Please make checks payable to MFDP and send to 926 Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E., Washington, DC. Ask to have yourself put on the MFDP mailing list to keep yourself informed on the Mississippi scene. If you have friends who might be interested in this letter, please have them read it.

Sincerely,
Leon R. Kass, M.D.

I've Been to the Mountaintop

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

In the spring of 1968, King traveled to Memphis to support the 1,300 striking sanitation workers protesting low wages and unfit working conditions. At this point in his ministry, he had broadened his mission, speaking out not only for racial justice but also for greater economic equality and against the Vietnam War. On the night of April 3, he gave this sermon to a crowd gathered in the Bishop Charles Mason Temple Church of God. He was assassinated the next day. It is eerie to read his remarks, comprising largely a summing up of his life and a prophecy for the future, knowing now that it would be his last public utterance.[44]

King begins his address with the assertion that he would choose no other time in which to live or lead, and ends with the affirmation that he has "seen the promised land." How does he justify his preference for the present age? The speech contains some ideas not present in the other King speeches in this collection: a call for "economic withdrawal" (boycotts) from non-cooperating white businesses, and the development and strengthening of separate black institutions and black-owned banks. Does this represent a retreat from his "black and white together" integrationist "Dream"?

King counsels, as well as models, how to be a better brother to our fellow men. Toward the end of his speech, he asks his listeners to "develop a dangerous kind of unselfishness." Applying the parable of the Good Samaritan to contemporary circumstances, he states: "The question is not, 'If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me?'" Rather, it is this: "If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?" What does King mean by dangerous unselfishness? How is King inviting his auditors—then and now—to see themselves? Is he persuasive? Finally, why does King conclude by recounting his near-death experience? And why does he self-consciously compare himself to Moses, who was also allowed to go up to the mountaintop and to glimpse—but not enter—the Promised Land? What "Promised Land" has King seen at the end of his life?

Thank you very kindly, my friends. As I listened to Ralph Abernathy in his eloquent and generous introduction and then thought about myself, I wondered who he was talking about.[45] It's always good to have your closest friend and associate say something good about you. And Ralph is the best friend that I have in the world.

I'm delighted to see each of you here tonight in spite of a storm warning. You reveal that you are determined to go on anyhow. Something is happening in Memphis,

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[44] *To listen to a recording of King's speech, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixfwGLxRJU8.*

[45] *Ralph David Abernathy Sr. (1926–90), born in Linden, Alabama, was a civil rights leader in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) with King. In May of 1968, after King was assassinated, Abernathy led the SCLC's Poor People's Campaign in its March on Washington in favor of federal antipoverty legislation.*

something is happening in our world. And you know, if I were standing at the beginning of time with the possibility of taking a kind of general and panoramic view of the whole human history up to now, and the Almighty said to me, "Martin Luther King, which age would you like to live in?" I would take my mental flight by Egypt, and I would watch God's children in their magnificent trek from the dark dungeons of Egypt through, or rather across the Red Sea, through the wilderness on toward the Promised Land. And in spite of its magnificence, I wouldn't stop there.

Read the speech here: http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/ive_been_to_the_mountaintop/.

Movement Tactics and Strategy

The Power of Nonviolence

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

After Rosa Parks' arrest and conviction, in 1955, for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger, the Negro citizens of Montgomery Alabama, under King's leadership, began a boycott of the city's buses in order to protest the law requiring racial segregation on public transportation. The boycott, perfectly legal, lasted for over a year until after the Supreme Court, in late 1956, upheld a lower court's decision that had ruled the city's segregationist laws unconstitutional. This victory for the combined approach of legal challenge and peaceful public protest was one of the first successful applications of King's teaching and strategy of nonviolent resistance. On June 4, 1957, at the invitation of the local YMCA and YWCA, King gave this speech at the University of California at Berkeley, in which he explained the philosophy and strategy of nonviolence. (As an appendix to King's speech, we add the text of the "Commitment Card," prepared by the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, on which Movement members pledged their adherence to the principles of nonviolence.)

King says that the method of nonviolent resistance is "strongly aggressive spiritually"? What does he mean by "spiritual aggression," and why is it morally not only acceptable but required? What are the aims of practicing nonviolent resistance, both for the opponent and for oneself? King argues that the philosophy of nonviolent resistance has at its center the teaching of love understood as agape*: "understanding, creative, redemptive good will for all men . . . an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return." How, in fact, does such love translate itself into action? If people are the authors of their deeds and responsible for their actions, can we really love a person unconditionally while, at the same time, hating the deeds that he does? How does King distinguish good moderation from bad moderation? Is it always possible, in concrete cases, to distinguish which is which?*

From the very beginning there was a philosophy undergirding the Montgomery boycott, the philosophy of nonviolent resistance. There was always the problem of getting this method over because it didn't make sense to most of the people in the beginning. We had to use our mass meetings to explain nonviolence to a community of people who had never heard of the philosophy and in many instances were not sympathetic with it. We had meetings twice a week on Mondays and on Thursdays, and we had an institute on nonviolence and social change. We had to make it clear that nonviolent resistance is not a method of cowardice. It does resist. It is not a method of stagnant passivity and deadening complacency. The nonviolent resister is just as opposed to the evil that he is standing against as the violent resister but he resists without violence. This method is nonaggressive physically but strongly aggressive spiritually.

Read the speech here:
http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1131.

* * *

APPENDIX: "Commitment Card"

ALABAMA CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

I hereby pledge myself—my person and body—to the nonviolent movement. Therefore I will keep the following ten commandments:

1. Meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.
2. Remember always that the nonviolent movement seeks justice and reconciliation—not victory.
3. Walk and talk in the manner of love, for God is love.
4. Pray daily to be used by God in order that all men might be free.
5. Sacrifice personal wishes in order that all men might be free.
6. Observe with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy.
7. Seek to perform regular service for others and for the world.
8. Refrain from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart.
9. Strive to be in good spiritual and bodily health.
10. Follow the directions of the movement and of the captain on a demonstration.

I sign this pledge, having seriously considered what I do and with the determination and will to persevere.

Name_____
Address_____
Phone_____
Nearest Relative_____
Address_____

Besides demonstrations, I could also help the movement by: (Circle the proper items)
Run errands, Drive my car, Fix food for volunteers, Clerical work, Make phone calls, Answer phones, Mimeograph, Type, Print signs, Distribute leaflets.

ALABAMA CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
Birmingham Affiliate of S.C.L.C.
505 1/2 North 17th Street
F.L. Shuttlesworth, President

The Welcome Table

LEE MARTIN

The goal of nonviolent direct action, according to King, is to lovingly prick the conscience and to win the friendship of the opponent, beginning by inducing shame but ending with brotherly reconciliation. The stresses of black-white relations, under conditions of segregation and in the face of protests, raise difficult challenges also for decent whites, not least about their own strengths of character and identity. In this disturbing story (1996) by novelist, short story writer and professor of creative writing at Ohio State University, Lee Martin (b. 1955), we see what happens to both father and son of a New Hampshire family that has relocated to Nashville, Tennessee during the time of the lunch counter sit-ins (1960). Richard, the father, changing his identity to avoid recognition for previous disgrace, takes the name of Thibodeaux ("bold among people" or "bold people"), and he with the help of his son Edward, the story's narrator, help prepare the black students at Fisk University for the insults and torments they are sure to face during the stormy days ahead. Meanwhile, Edward's mother produces eggshell miniature art, in the hope of beautifying the chaotic world around her. All their efforts are for naught, as they find that they cannot handle the racial trouble that erupts.

Collecting as many details from the story as you can, describe all the characters in the story, and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. How do you explain Edward's shameful conduct at the sit-in? Is the problem a lack of courage, doubts about his own identity, or latent racial prejudice? Are the sins of the father visited on the son? What does Edward finally learn about his father? About himself? What light does this story shed on black-white relations, and especially on the causes of the behavior of whites? What might this story imply about the usefulness of shame as a means to effecting racial reconciliation? What is the meaning of the title, "The Welcome Table"?

Three nights a week, when I was seventeen, my father took me downtown and made me shout "monkey," and "nigger," and "coon." He made me shout these things, he said, because he loved me. "Put your heart into it," he told me whenever my voice would falter. "Go on. Get with it. Give it everything you've got."

It was 1960, a touch-and-go time in Nashville. An activist named James Lawson[46] was organizing students from the black colleges, and because my father sold greeting cards to black-owned variety stores, he had gotten word of the lunch counter sit-ins that were about to get underway. He had decided to hook up with the integration movement because he couldn't resist the drama of it. "This is history," he said to me one night. "The world is going to change, Ed, and someday you'll be able to say you were part of it."

[46] *During the fall of 1959, James Lawson (b. 1928), a divinity student at Vanderbilt University, taught students how to organize sit-ins and use the tactics of nonviolent direct action. Later, he was a leader in the Freedom Rides of 1961.*

He had volunteered my services as well because he knew I was at an age when it would be difficult for me to stand up for right, and he wanted me to get a head start on being a man of conscience and principle.

Our job was to prepare the students for the abuse they were sure to get. So, on those nights, in classrooms at Fisk University, we stood over the young men and women, and did our best to make their lives sad. My father was a handsome man with wavy hair and long, black eyelashes. He had a friendly smile and a winning way about him, but when he started his taunting, his face would go hard with loathing.

"Get the niggers," he would shout. "Let's get these monkeys out of here."

At his urging, I would join in. "Nigger," I would say, and my jaw and lips would tighten with the word.

We would pick at the students' hair. We would shove at them and pull them down to the floor.

When the workshop leader would call our demonstration to a halt, we would help the students up, and brush off their clothes, and laugh a bit, just to remind them that we were playacting. But always there would be heat in their eyes, because, of course, it was all different for them.

One of the students was a young man named Lester Bates. He had a reddish tint to his hair, and his hands were broad and long-fingered. One night, during a break, he clamped his hand around my wrist. I was holding a bottle of Coca-Cola, and he said to me, "Don't drop it. Hold, boy. Keep a grip."

I could feel my hand going numb, my fingers tingling, and just when I was about to drop the bottle, Lester grabbed it. "This is going to get ugly" he said. "You know that, don't you? This whole town is going to explode." He took a drink from the bottle and handed it back to me. "Days like this make a body wonder what kind of stuff a man is made of."

He stood there, watching, and I did the only thing I could. I raised the bottle to my lips, and I drank.

I wanted to feel good about what we were doing—my father and I—but I hated him for bringing me into those classrooms. I hated him because he made my life uncomfortable. Some nights, on the way home, he would imagine a car was trailing us, and he would pull to the side of the streets just to make sure we were safe. "There are limits," he said to me once, and he said it in a way that made it clear that he was one who knew those limits, and I was one who did not.

My father was Richard Thibodeaux, but it wasn't his real name. The previous spring, he had fled a scandal in New Hampshire. He had managed a cemetery there, and in the

harsh winters, when the ground was so frozen graves were impossible to dig, the corpses were preserved in charnel houses until the spring thaw. Then, sometime in April, assembly-line burials began: the air shook with the raucous sound of heavy machinery digging the plots, the cranes hoisting concrete liner vaults from flatbed trucks. Sometimes, in the rush, the wrong bodies were put into the wrong graves, a fact that came out when one of the grave diggers spilled the news.

After that, we didn't stand a chance. It was a small town, and the rumors were vicious. We were cannibals, devil worshippers; we all had sex with corpses.

"How can we live here now?" my mother said one night to my father. "You've ruined us."

So we came south to Nashville. My mother, who had been there once to the Grand Ole Opry, chose it for its friendliness.

"Anywhere," said my father, "away from this snow and ice."

Any city, he must have been thinking, large enough to forget its dead.

Our first morning there, we left my mother in the motor court cabin we had rented, and went looking for a cemetery. "That mess in New Hampshire," my father said. "Let's put it behind us."

Nashville was brilliant with sunshine. My father put the top down on our Ford Fairlane 500, a '57 Skyliner with a retractable hardtop, and we drove past antebellum estates with guitarshaped swimming pools and manicured lawns landscaped with azalea bushes and dogwood trees. My father whistled a Frank Sinatra tune—"Young at Heart"—and for the first time since we had left New Hampshire, I believed in what we were doing.

"Don't think I'm a wicked person," my father said.

"I don't," I told him.

"People make mistakes, Ed." He lifted a hand and rubbed his eyes. "This must seem like a dream to you."

"It's something interesting," I said. "Something I might read about."

"That's you." He slapped me on the leg. "Steady Eddie. Just like your mother."

My mother was at a time in her life when her looks were leaving her, but instead of complaining, she had developed a habit of surrounding herself with beautiful things. In New Hampshire, she had learned how to do eggshell art. She would take an egg and poke a hole in each end with a pin she had saved from an old corsage. Then she would insert

the pin and break the yolk, hold the egg to her mouth, and blow out the insides. She would soak each eggshell in bleach, dry it, and then spray it with a clear acrylic paint.

The paint strengthened the shell, and my mother could then use cuticle scissors to cut away a section: an oval, or heart-shaped, or teardrop opening into the hollow egg. Inside the shells, she painted background scenery, and then with plaster of paris, she built platforms on which she could position miniature figures, some of them only a quarter of an inch tall, to create scenes she would then name: “Chateau against Snow-Covered Mountains,” “Collie Waiting by Stone Wall,” “Skier Sliding down Icy Slope.” It was a precise and painstaking art, each motion calculated and sure. The shells were surprisingly strong, and she rarely broke one. If one did happen to shatter, she would throw it away and start again. “Why curse your mistakes?” she said to me once. “Why not look at them as new opportunities?”

My father had come to Nashville, hoping for a new start at life, and that day in the cemetery, beneath the boughs of a cedar tree, he found what he was looking for: the headstone of a child who had died at the age of two in 1920, the year of my father’s birth.

“That’s going to be my name now,” he said. “Richard Thibodeaux. It’s a good southern name, don’t you think?”

“What about your old name?” I asked him. “What about my name?”

He said he would go to the County Clerk’s office and get a copy of Richard Thibodeaux’s birth certificate. Then he would pay a visit to the Social Security Administration and apply for a card under his new name. If anyone got curious about why, at his age, he was just then getting around to applying for a card, he would tell them his parents had been Baptist missionaries, that he had been born in Tennessee, but had gone with his parents to South America where he had spent nearly all his adult life carrying out their work.

“What about me?” I said. “What’s my story?”

My father put his finger to his lips and thought a moment. “That’s a snap,” he finally said. “I met your mother, the fair and pious daughter of a coffee plantation owner, an American from New Orleans, married her, and nine months later, you were born. You were a delicate child, given to fevers and ailments of the lungs. Finally, we had no choice but to send you back to America, away from the tropics, to live with your aunt in Memphis.” He put his arms around me and pressed me to him. “And now here we are, united again. You see how easy it is? I’ll tell anyone who gets nosy we’re starting a new life.”

And that’s what he did. Once he had the birth certificate and the social security card, the rest was a breeze. We rented a modest home, and my father became Richard Thibodeaux, region five sales representative for the Glorious Days Greeting Card Company. He finagled some school forms from a print shop he knew and concocted a set

of records for me. He gave me a near-perfect attendance record at Memphis East High School, excellent marks in citizenship, better grades than I had ever been able to manage.

"There," he said. "Now, you're set. A completely new profile. *Alacazam.*"

He wanted to make sure no one ever linked our name with what he had begun to call "that misery in New Hampshire."

"I lost my self-respect there," he said to me. "That's the worst thing that can happen to a man."

My mother's eyes sparkled when she learned our new last name. "Penny Thibodeaux," she said, and I knew, like me, she had fallen in love with the elegant sound of those three syllables.

In school, when teachers called me by my full name—*Edward Thibodeaux*—I answered "yes, sir," or "yes, ma'am." I developed a soft-spoken gentility and impeccable manners. The change of climate, my father said, had done us a world of good.

It was a sweet time for us there in Nashville. Saturday evenings, we drove downtown to the Ryman Auditorium and took in the Opry. My father's favorite singer was Hawkshaw Hawkins. He was tall and lean, and he wore his cowboy hat cocked back on his head. My mother preferred Jan Howard because she was graceful and had a sweet smile. After the show, we would cruise down Broadway, the top down on our Skyliner. We would drive by the music and record shops, and sometimes my mother would slide over next to my father, and I would lay my head back and close my eyes and let the night air rush over my face and give thanks for Nashville and the second chance we had hit upon there.

"The Athens of the South," my father said once. "Milk and honey. Folks here know style when they see it."

Each day at noon, whenever he was on his route, he would find a public rest room where he could change his shirt.

"You can tell a man by his clothes," he explained to me. "A tidy man lives a tidy life."

He wore suspenders, and linen suits, and wingtip shoes he polished and buffed each night before going to bed. He had monogrammed handkerchiefs and ties. He carried a new leather briefcase full of sample cards, and when he swept into stationery shops and drugstores, he doffed his Panama hat, and said to the ladies behind the counters, "It's a glorious day for Glorious Days."

The Glorious Days Greeting Card Company specialized in sensitivity cards: genteel messages to commemorate birthdays, anniversaries, weddings. Selling them, my father

said, made him feel he was contributing to the general celebration of living. He had been occupied too long with the burying of the dead, with mourning and grief.

"A gloomy Gus is a grumpy Gus," he said one day. "But that's all behind me now. Nothing but blue skies. Isn't that right, Ed? Hey, from here on, we're walking the sunny side of the street."

I know my father didn't mean to make trouble for me, but of course, that was the way it all worked out. Some boys at school had seen the two of us going through the gates at Fisk University, and before long, the word was out that I was a "nigger lover."

One day, a boy name Dale Mink said a group was going downtown to stir up a ruckus. He was the center on our basketball team and an honor student. He had already won a scholarship to Vanderbilt. Even now, I don't think he was a thug; he was just caught up in the ugliness of those days. The way of life he had always known was changing, and he was afraid. "Those nigras think they can get away with this," he said to me. "You're either with us, or you're not."

The lunch counter sit-ins had been going on for over a week. Downtown, at Kress's, McClellans, Woolworth's, Walgreens, black students were occupying stools even though the ten-cent stores had chosen to close their counters rather than serve them.

My father came and went through these stores, selling Glorious Days greeting cards. Each evening, at dinner, he told us how the students sat there, studying for their classes. They were remarkable, he said—"as sober as judges"—the young men in dark suits with thin lapels and white shirts as bright as judgment day, the girls poised, as they unwound their head scarves and folded their duffle coats over the back of their stools.

Sometimes, my father said, a waitress would call him back to the kitchen and set him up with a hamburger and a Coca-Cola, on account of she knew him as a man on the road who needed a hot lunch.

"You actually do that?" my mother said one night. "You sit there and eat while those poor kids do without?"

In those days, my father had a smugness about the new life he was inventing for us. He was so sure of the right direction we were taking, he had convinced himself that we deserved special liberties.

"I never thought," he told my mother. "Call me an idiot. Lord alive."

My mother was, by nature, a cheerful woman, and once we had left New Hampshire, she did her best to believe her life had been handed back to her. She worked part-time in an arts and craft shop, and afternoons, when I came home from school, she asked me to help her with her eggshells. She sensed, better than my father, how brutal these times

would become—how they would ruin people—and she was determined to maintain a certain beauty and delicacy in my life. She showed me how to transform a quail egg into a basket by cutting out the handle and adorning it with pearls and velvet ribbons. Together, we made eggs into cradles and lined them with lace.

This all seemed to me a terribly womanly thing to do, but slowly her optimism won me. When I watched her paint background scenes on the eggshells—amazed at how a few strokes could create trees, clouds, blades of grass—I fell in love with the way vast landscapes yielded to her slightest effort. When I was with her, I believed she could shrink anything that was difficult or immeasurable.

"Proportion," she told me. "That's the key. Making things fit."

Finally, she let me paint scenes of my own, and when I did, my fingers tingled with the delicacy of their motions. In New Hampshire, I had fallen into some trouble—vandalism, truancy, petty thievery—and I convinced myself that each gentle stroke I made was saving me from a life of violence and mayhem.

I rode downtown that day with Dale Mink. In Kress's, a gang of boys from the high school were prowling behind the students at the lunch counter. The boys' shirt collars were turned up, and their heel taps were clacking over the tile floor. Somewhere in the store, a radio was playing WSM. Later, I would learn that the station's call letters came from its original owner, The National Life and Accident Insurance Company, whose motto was "We Shield Millions." But I didn't know that then. I only knew I was in a place I didn't want to be. I was there because things were getting hot for me at school—"nigger lover"—and like most people, I wanted my life to be easy and sweet.

The radio went off, and one of the boys stepped forward, closer to the students, and said in a low, steady voice, "Get your coon assess off those stools."

The students refused to turn their heads or let their shoulders slump with shame. I noticed, then, that one of the students was Lester Bates. He closed the book he had been reading and put his hands on the edge of the counter. The girl next to him turned her head just a fraction of an inch, and I could see her lips move. "This is it," she said.

The high school boys were squawking now: *nigger* this and *nigger* that. Some of them were jostling the students. Dale Mink elbowed me in the side. I knew he was waiting for me to join in the jeering. If there is one thing I would want people to understand, all these years later, it would be this: I didn't want to be Dale Mink, only something like him.

So I shouted, "Nigger."

I had done it hundreds of times with my father at training sessions.

“Nigger,” I shouted, and I convinced myself it was only a word, that I was only one voice swallowed up by the voice of the mob.

But then the gang surged forward, and I saw Dale Mink latch onto Lester Bates. Dale jerked him backward, onto the floor, and soon I heard the dull thuds of punches and kicks finding cheekbones and ribs.

I’m ashamed to think now of the fear I helped cause Lester Bates and those other young men and women. I have never been able to watch news films from those days, and until now, I have kept my part in them a secret.

When I got home that afternoon, my mother was waiting for me so we could finish an eggshell we had been working on that week. It was a dining room scene. We had lined the inside of the shell with wallpaper, and had built a table and four chairs from balsa wood. We had upholstered the chair seats with velvet ribbons and made a tablecloth from lace. My mother had brought home three miniature figures from the arts and crafts store: a man, a woman, and a young boy.

“Here’s your father and me,” she said. She put the miniature man and woman into adjacent chairs. Then she handed the miniature boy to me. “And here’s you. Go on, Ed. Have a seat.”

I didn’t know where to put the boy who was supposed to be me. After the scene at Kress’s, I didn’t know where I belonged. I closed my hand around the figurine and felt it press into my palm.

“There was a fight at Kress’s today,” I said. “At the lunch counter. A bunch of boys from school went down there, and I went along. I said some things, and now I wish I hadn’t.”

My mother put her hand over my fist. “Don’t let yourself get caught up in this,” she said. “Listen to me. People have to live their lives the best they can. We’ve had too much trouble as it is.”

“I can’t forget it,” I said. “How do you forget something terrible you’ve done?”

“You do whatever you have to do to get beyond it.” My mother opened my fist and took the figurine and sat it in the chair whose back was turned to us. “There,” she said. “It’s cozy, isn’t it? Inviting. Let’s call this one, ‘The Welcome Table.’”

“There’s nothing on the table,” I said. “We’re not doing anything.”

My mother thought a moment. “We’re waiting.”

“For what?”

"Who knows?" She snapped her fingers. "Hey, Buster Brown, get out of your shoe. The sky's the limit. For whatever's going to happen next."

Because my mother worked at the arts and crafts store, she had made some friends. One of them was a woman named Dix Gleason, and sometimes in the afternoons she would drop by for a visit. My mother was thrilled and worried on these occasions, happy for the company, but afraid her hospitality would fall short of Dix's approval. "You'd think she give a party notice," she said the first time Dix's car pulled up to our curb. "Heaven's sake. What do I have in the kitchen? Mercy, let's see. What can I whip up to suit Miss Dix?"

Dix Gleason was a loud woman who left lipstick stains on my mother's drinking glasses. She called me *Eddie* in a whiny voice like Top Gigio, the mouse puppet on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, and she called my mother *Henny Penny*, a nickname I knew my mother despised.

"Like I was some hysterical old dame," she said to me once. "Honestly. The idea."

Some afternoons, Dix brought her husband, The Commodore.

Commodore Gleason was an accident reconstruction specialist for the highway patrol. He was intimate with the facts of crash and disaster. At accident scenes, he measured skid marks, gauged road conditions, interviewed survivors. He calculated the speed of travel, the angle of impact, reconstituted the moment of poor judgment or unfortunate circumstance.

"I can raise the dead," he boasted to us once after he had testified at a coroner's inquest. "I can bring them back to that moment where everything is A-okay. They're driving a Chevrolet down Route 45, just before eight p.m. The road is dry, visibility is fifteen miles, their speed is fifty-eight miles per hour."

If only he could leave them there, he said, happy and safe in their ignorance. But he knew too much. He knew that thirty miles up the road a Pontiac was streaking their way, that they would meet head-on at the top of a hill just before sunset.

"It's a burden to know as much as I do," he told us. "Take it from me: men are fools more often than not."

I was afraid of The Commodore. He had a way of making me feel nothing in my life would ever be safe.

Once, he came to my school and showed a blood-and-gore film about highway safety and traffic fatalities. He was snappy and regulation in his uniform: necktie firmly knotted, collar tips pointed, badge gleaming, trousers pressed, belt buckle polished. He told us about head-on crashes, decapitations, body bags.

“I know what you’re thinking,” he said. “You’re thinking, this can’t happen to me. That’s what we all think. That’s why we have to prepare ourselves for every hazard. Even you cool cats. Hell, you think you’ll live forever.”

One afternoon, my mother had sent me to the store for ice cream, and The Commodore had insisted we take his car. “You drive, sport,” he said to me.

Before I could start the car, he jerked the keys from the ignition.

“Imagine the moment, Edward.” He shook the keys in his hand as if they were dice. “That instant of horror when you know you’re losing control. Your speed is too high, the road is too slick, the curve is too sharp. You’re at that place you never dreamed you’d be. Brink of disaster, pal. One wrong move, and you cross over. Too late to get yourself back to safe ground. What do you do?”

“Don’t panic,” I said.

“And?”

“React.”

He tossed me the keys. “Okay, Speedy Alkaseltzer. Let’s see if you’ve got any pizz.”

The afternoon my mother and I finished “The Welcome Table,” our doorbell rang.

“Ding-dong,” Dix Gleason shouted. “It’s Dix and The Commodore.”

The Commodore was off-duty. He was wearing a salt-and-pepper sports coat and a bolo tie with a silver horseshoe clasp. His black hair was shiny with tonic.

“Sport,” he said to me. “I’d say you’ve been in some trouble.”

“Trouble?” my mother said. “There been no trouble here.”

The Commodore pointed to my shirt pocket where a corner had been torn away in the melee at Kress’s. “I don’t imagine your mama sent you to school with your pocket like that. And that lip of yours. Looks a little fat to me. Like it got in the way of someone’s fist.”

“You might as well come clean,” Dix said. She was wearing a lavender cowgirl dress with golden fringe along the bottom of the skirt. “You can’t put anything past The Commodore.”

A stray punch had clobbered me at Kress’s, but I didn’t want to admit any of this to The Commodore. Luckily, my mother came to my rescue. “Just a scuffle,” she said. “You know boys.”

"Tempers are on the boil," The Commodore said. "What with the nigras all up in the air. I hear there's been some nasty business downtown today."

My mother was always on edge whenever The Commodore was around, but on this afternoon, she looked close to coming apart. She bustled about, pulling out chairs for Dix and The Commodore at our dining table, going on and on about the eggshell we had just finished and what a funny thing it was that it was a miniature scene of people sitting around a dining table, and here we were sitting around a regular-sized table.

"Like a box inside a box," she said. "Or those hand-painted Russian dolls. Oh, you know the ones I mean. Take off the top half and there's a smaller doll inside. Five or six of them like that all the way down to the tiniest one—no bigger than the first joint of your pinky finger, Dix—and the funny thing is, even though the last one is so much smaller than the first one, their features are exactly the same."

The Commodore picked up "The Welcome Table" eggshell from its ornate stand, and held it with his thick fingers. "I bet there'd be something different," he said. "Something small, practically impossible to pick out. I bet I'd find it."

"Be careful with that," Dix said, and she said it with a hardness to her voice like a woman who had lived too long with a reckless man. "You bust that and Henny Penny might lose her head."

"It must take a world of patience." The Commodore set the eggshell back on its stand. "I'd say you'd have to have a ton of love to pay such close attention to things."

My mother ran her hand over our tablecloth. "Why, thank you, Commodore." A blush came into her face as if she were a young girl, unaccustomed to compliments. "That means a great deal, coming from someone with your keen eye."

It had been some time since my mother had been able to enjoy friends. In New Hampshire, when the truth of my father's mismanagement became public, she closed our blinds and refused to answer the telephone or the doorbell. Now, despite Dix's forwardness and The Commodore's suspicious nature, she was thankful for Nashville and the chance it had given her to be gracious and hospitable. When she came from our kitchen that afternoon, the serving tray held before her, the dessert cups filled with sherbet, the coffee cups chiming against their saucers, she might as well have been offering her soul to The Commodore and Dix, so desperate she was to have people admire her.

The Commodore had gone out on the porch to smoke a cigarette.

"Run, get The Commodore," my mother told me. "Tell him his sherbet's going to melt."

He was sitting on our porch glider, a cigarette hanging from his lip. He was reading a Glorious Days greeting card my father had left there. "Listen to this, Edward. 'May your special day be filled with sunshine and love.' Now that is a beautiful sentiment." He folded the card and tapped its spine against his leg. "Your daddy's not like me, is he?"

"No, sir. I suppose he's not."

"What you have to decide," he told me, "is whether that's a good thing."

I wanted my father to be noble and full of goodness. "He's been helping the Negroes organize the lunch counter demonstrations," I said.

The Commodore took a long drag on his cigarette. "How about you? What do you make of that?"

I touched my finger to my sore lip. "It's caused me some grief."

"Understand, I don't have anything against the nigras." He flipped his cigarette butt out into our yard. "But people here are set in their ways. I'm only telling you this for your own good. Whatever happens with this integration mess, your daddy has to live here."

When The Commodore said that, something lurched and gave inside me. The life we had invented for ourselves cracked and began to come apart. For the first time, I could see the raw truth of my family: we were cowards. If things didn't work out for us here, as they hadn't in New Hampshire, we could go somewhere else. We could choose a new name. We could do it as many times as we needed to—move away from ourselves, like opening one of those Russian dolls and finding another one inside. I saw us shrinking with each move we made until we got down to the smallest people we could be, the ones that wouldn't open, the ones made from solid wood.

The Commodore laid the greeting card on the porch glider. "Edward, your daddy ought to take care. You be sure to tell him what I said."

We were eating sherbet when my father came home. We heard his car pull into the driveway, and my mother smiled and said to me, "How's that for luck? Your father's home early. Won't he be surprised to see we've got company?"

"Your husband?" Dix said. "My stars. We finally get to meet the mister."

My father came through the door and walked right up to the dining table and sat down across from The Commodore as if he had been expected. He kept his head bowed, and I could tell something was wrong. His hands were on the table, and his fingers were trembling, and the eggshell was wobbling on its stand. We all bowed our heads, as if we were asking a blessing, and for a long time, no one spoke.

Then my mother said, "Richard?" And she said it with the cautious tone I remembered from New Hampshire.

My father still wouldn't raise his head, and I'm not sure he even knew there were other people sitting at his table, people he didn't know, and wouldn't care for once he did. "I saw a boy killed today," he said, and his voice was barely a whisper. "That's all I want to say about it."

"Killed?" my mother said, and I think she knew, even then, that trouble had found us.

That's when The Commodore spoke. "An accident?"

Dix slapped his arm. "Mr. Thibodeaux said he doesn't want to say any more about it." When she said that, her voice steeled with warning, I could tell she had never gotten used to The Commodore's intimacy with accidents and deaths, hated him for it, no doubt, in ways she might not even have known.

But The Commodore wouldn't keep quiet. "I hope you weren't involved with it. That's all I'll say."

My father raised his face, and I could tell he was trying to hold himself together. His jaw was set, and his lips were tight, but his eyes were wet, and I could see he was crying.

"Probably some of that nigra mess," The Commodore said. "Is that it, pal?"

It was clear to me, then, that The Commodore hated something about my father, feared it, perhaps, and I decided it was the fact that my father was a careless man.

"If it is," The Commodore went on, "you asked for your trouble. Like those hotrodders who think the speed limit means everyone else but them. They don't see the danger. Buddy, you get out there on the wild side, something's bound to go wrong. Hell, you know it. I wouldn't think you'd have any call to cry over that."

"What's your name?" my father said to The Commodore. He turned to Dix. "Is this your husband?"

He wasn't crying now; his voice had that edge to it I recognized from the sit-in training sessions.

"His name's Commodore Gleason," Dix said. "We're friends of your wife. Dix and The Commodore."

"The Commodore's with the highway patrol," my mother said.

"He does accident reports," I told my father, hoping to explain The Commodore's interest in the boy's death, and somehow make my father feel better about all this.

“What do you do at an accident scene?” he asked The Commodore.

“I put it all together,” The Commodore said. “Gather the facts, pal. Tell you how it happened.”

“Talk to the survivors, do you?”

“That’s right.”

“Tell them you’re sorry for their trouble?”

The Commodore gave a little laugh. “Say, what kind of a bastard do you think I am?”

“Do you mean it when you say it?” my father asked. “When you tell them you’re sorry?”

“Listen, pal.”

“Do you?”

“I’m there to get at the facts.” The Commodore slapped his palm down on the table, and the eggshell wobbled again, and my mother put her hand to her mouth. “I’m there to get at the truth, pal. It’s my job to know things.” The Commodore stood up and pointed his finger at my father. “Just like I know what you’re up to with the nigras. It’s people like you who’ll ruin the South. Even your own boy knows that. He’s been clubbing niggers downtown today.”

It’s funny how your life slows down the moments you wish you could speed away from and leave behind you forever. I could see the smallest details: the way the gold fringe on Dix Gleason’s dress turned silver in the sunlight slanting through our window, my mother wetting her finger and rubbing at a spot of sherbet that had stained her white tablecloth, the way one string of The Commodore’s bolo tie was shorter than the other, my father’s shoulders sagging as if all the life had left him.

“Is that true, Ed?” he said to me.

I remembered the way I had shouted “nigger” at Kress’s, how I had pushed my way out of the mob once the fighting had started. I had run outside, and had started walking, wanting to get as far away from Kress’s as I could. I had walked and walked, and then I had caught a city bus and come home, and now The Commodore had lied about me, and because I felt so guilty about my part in the trouble downtown, because I wanted all this between The Commodore and my father to stop before it went too far, and The Commodore found out all there was to know about us—that our name wasn’t Thibodeaux, that my father had made mistakes in New Hampshire, that we had tried our best to bury these facts—I said, yes, it was true.

My father slumped down in his chair. “I’m sorry,” he said. “Folks, I’m sorry for all of this.”

And The Commodore said, “Damn straight you’re sorry. I could have told you that from the get-go.”

The boy who died that day was not a Negro as we all had first believed. It was, as I would find out later, Dale Mink. He had come from Kress’s, jubilant, the way he was after a basketball victory. He must have been feeling pretty full of himself. He was seventeen years old, a basketball star on his way to Vanderbilt, and he had the juice of a fist fight jazzing around in his head. When he ran out into the street, and saw my father’s car, he must have been dazzled by how quickly misfortune had found him.

It was, my father finally told us, something he had played over in his head time and time again after he had told his story to the police: the street had been wet with rain, and the police vans had pulled up to Kress’s. The officers were gathering up the black college students, arresting them for disorderly conduct, and the white boys who had attacked them were spilling out into the street. They were raising their arms and shaking their fists. My father glanced into his rearview mirror and noticed the way the skin was starting to wrinkle around his eyes. When he finally looked back to the street, there was Dale Mink, and it was too late for my father to stop.

My mother and I didn’t know any of this when Dix and The Commodore left our house.

“He knows about you now,” my mother said to my father. “He’ll tell it over and over. And then where will we be?”

“Were you there?” my father asked me. “At Kress’s?”

“I went with a boy from school. I didn’t hit anyone. I said some things. That’s all.”

“You said things? Provoked those poor students? What did you say?”

I let my face go wooden, the way Lester Bates had when he had gripped the lunch counter, and the taunting had begun, “Things you taught me,” I said.

My father lifted his hand, and with his finger, he brushed a piece of lint from his eyelashes. I wanted to think that he was an unlucky man—“Trouble knows my name,” he had said in New Hampshire—but I could see he was actually a man of vanity. I knew that was a dangerous thing to be in the world. It meant forgetting others and concentrating only on yourself, and, when that was the case, all kinds of lunatic things could happen.

“I’m hungry,” my father said. “I swear, Penny. I’m starved.”

We were sitting at our dining table, and outside the light was fading. The eggshell was still upright in its stand, and what I remembered was how, when my father had first sat down, we had all bowed our heads and stared at it. I like to believe now that each of us, even The Commodore, was thinking, what a lovely scene. “Inviting,” my mother had said earlier. The people around the miniature table seemed cozy and content. We must have looked at them with a desperate yearning. They were so small. They were so far away from us and everything that was about to happen in our home.

Food That Pleases, Food to Take Home

ANTHONY GROOMS

Like the previous selection, this story by African American writer and educator, Anthony "Tony" Grooms (b. 1955), taken from his 1995 collection Trouble No More*, is set during the days of the lunch counter sit-ins, in this case in Grooms' hometown of Louisa, Virginia. Also like the previous story, this one exposes the human complexities of the racial situation, this time mainly from the side of two young African American girls, who, inspired by a sermon from their minister, decide to go to a local lunch counter and "demand their rights." And it, too, raises questions about the strategy of nonviolent resistance, this time about the difficulty, for the resister, of purging anger and practicing* agape*, the love which, according to King, is the heart of the "power of nonviolence."*

Collecting all the evidence you can from the entire story, characterize Mary and Annie and explain, if you can, their differences. Where is courage in this story, and where love and compassion? What does Annie discover through her encounter with "the monster"? What is the connection between exercising your human rights *and exercising your* humanity *or your love of neighbor? What should follow for race relations, as Annie discovers, that none of us can help the way we are born?*

Annie McPhee wasn't sure about what Mary Taliferro was telling her. Mary said that colored people in Louisa should stand up for their rights. They were doing it in the cities. Mary said that Channel Six from Richmond had shown pictures of Negroes sitting at lunch counters. She laughed that "colored people" were becoming "Negroes." Walter Cronkite[47] had shown pictures from Albany and Birmingham. Negroes were on the move.

On the church lawn one bright Sunday, Mary caught hold of Annie's arm and whispered, "What choo think of Reverend Green's sermon?" She knew Annie had eyes for Reverend Green.

"It was nice," Annie said. She pushed the pillbox back onto her head and patted her flip curl.

"But don't you think he was right about doing something?"

"'Course he was right," Annie said with a smack of her lips, "but ain't nobody gone to do nothing." Then she saw a glint in Mary's eye. "What you gone do and where?"

"We could march."

"Who gone march?" Mary held her hat against the wind that rustled through the fallen oak leaves.

[47] *Walter Cronkite (1916–2009), an American broadcast journalist, best known as anchorman for the* CBS Evening News *for 19 years (1962–81).*

"We could organize a march downtown. We could march down Main Street and tell them white folks that we want our rights."

"And that'll be the end of it, girl. Who gone march with you? Everybody around here is scared to march."

Mary pulled on Annie's elbow and guided her away from the folks gathering in front of the clapboard church to the pebbly space next to the cemetery. "I know what you thinking, girl. But I'm too tired of it to be scared. I wish something *would* happen around here and I figure we just the ones to start it."

"*You* the one." Annie put on her dark glasses. "Tell me who I look like?"

"Hummph." Mary turned up her lips for a second. "I don't know, girl. Elizabeth Taylor?"

"Nurrrh, child. You know I don't look like no 'Lizabeth Taylor. Somebody else. Somebody even more famous than that."

"Richard Burton."

"I'm gone kill you. Do I look like a man?" Annie gave Mary one more chance: she stepped back, her heel sinking into the soft hill of a grave, and put her hands on her hips. The wind folded her dress against her thighs. "Look at the hair and the glasses."

Mary frowned as she examined Annie and finally she gave up.

"Jackie Kennedy! Don't I look just like Jackie Kennedy?"

"Yeah, with the sunglasses, I guess you do," Mary said. "Anybody would, even me, if I had them sunglasses on."

"It'll take more than a pair of sunglasses . . ."

"But for real," Mary continued and started toward the parking lot, "we would start something. We could make the news if we did something in Louisa. I can just see myself sittin' up there on Walter Cronkite."

"Sittin' in the Louisa jail be more like it. Them white folks don't want no trouble."

"It don't matter what *they* want. Just like Reverend Green said, it matter what's right."

"Then how come *he* ain't doing it?"

"I bet he will if somebody started it. You know he's a preacher and he just can't run out and start no stuff." Mary placed her palms on the hood of the used Fairlane she had bought in Richmond with a down payment she had saved from factory work. She leaned up on her toes as Reverend Green was known to do and deepened her voice. "The Lord helps them that helps themselves. Amen. Say, the Lord provides!"

Annie swatted at her and giggled. "Somebody gone hear you."

"The Lord will part the Red Sea of injustice and send down the manna of equal rights."

"Bill Green don't sound like that." Annie folded her arms.

"Since when you call him 'Bill'?"

"Since when I want to."

Mary's round cheeks dimpled and her teeth contrasted with her purplish black face. "Just think how *Bill* Green would like it if we did something."

"How do you know what *Reverend* Green would like?" Annie whispered pointedly.

"I just bet he would."

They dressed to kill. They put on Sunday suits, high heels, and pillboxes. Mary wore her good wig. They put on lipstick and rouge and fake eyelashes and drove to town in Mary's Fairlane. They had decided to sit in at May's Drugstore. They parked at the far end of the one-stoplight street, deserted in the cool midmorning. People were at work in the factory, or in the fields, or at the schools. The few people they passed stared at them, but no one knew them.

"Don't you just hate it?" Mary said, seeming to bolster her anger as they walked down toward the store. "If you go in there, the minute you step in the door, ole lady May will break her neck running over to you—'Can I he'p you'—you know, in that syrupy sweet way. She won't let you look around for a second."

"'Fraid you gone steal something." Annie looked straight ahead down the street of wooden and brick shops. The perspective was broken by the courthouse square and the little brick jailhouse beside it. Annie forced herself to match Mary's determined stride lest her legs tremble so badly she fell.

"Or just *touch* something. And a white person—they can put their hands on anything they want. Pick up stuff and put it back. Like they own everything."

"Lord, you know we better not touch nothing unless we ready to pay for it. Better have the money in your hand." Annie's voice trailed and stopped abruptly when she caught a glimpse of the sheriff's car parked behind the courthouse. What would Bill Green think if she got arrested? she wondered. She thought about the stories she had heard from her uncles, her mother's younger brothers, about spending time in the jailhouse for speeding or drinking. They told about the sheetless cots, the stench of the pee pot, but said that the sheriff's wife's biscuits were good. Annie did not want to try the sheriff's wife's biscuits. She did not want to be dragged out of May's by the sheriff, to be touched by his big hands with the hairy knuckles she had once seen up close when he had come to give a talk at her high school. They thought of being close to him, his chewed cigar and the big leather lump of holster and gun sent shivers through her. But Bill Green said that God would send the manna of justice if they would only stand up.

Mary grimaced and balled up her fists as if to force her anger to a boiling point. "White people make me sick. Every last one of them. Sick. What I'd really like to do is to take ole lady May by her scrawny little neck and choke her."

Annie tried to laugh, but her voice was too jittery. "We're supposed to be *peace* demonstrators."

"I'd like to kick a piece of her butt."

"I don't like her either," Annie said, thinking what Reverend Green might say, "but let's do this the right way. Let's just go in and ask to be served and . . ." Annie stopped under May's green awning.

"And when she don't?" Mary whispered. "What then?"

Except for the awning, May's was a flat-faced, white clapboard building with a flat roof and a stepped crest. Only one of its double doors opened to admit customers. A bell jingled when they entered. Annie stood with Mary by the door, her eyes adjusting to the dimness, and breathed in a mixture of smells dominated by dust and wood polish. To her right was the cashier's stand with a display of pocket combs, and crowded on long narrow shelves in the middle of the store were goods: bolts of cloth, children's dolls, sewing kits, toiletries, firecrackers, shotgun shells, fashion magazines, and among everything, *The Central*, the town's weekly newspaper. In the back, the RX sign hung from the ceiling above the druggist's counter, hidden behind the clutter of inventory. Along the left wall was a linoleum-topped lunch counter with five backless stools anchored in front of it. It was junked with jars of pickles, loaves of sandwich bread, buns and cake plates bearing doughnuts and pies. The spigots of a broken soda fountain were partially hidden in the clutter. Behind the counter was a grand mirror with ornate framing. It was placarded with menus and handwritten signs announcing "specials." The mirror was grease-spattered on one side from a small electric grill that sat on a shelf. On the other side, two huge coolers stood bubbling lemonade and orangeade. A broken neon sign above the mirror announced, "FOOD THAT PLEASES, FOOD TO TAKE HOME." High above were shelves on which rested plastic wreathes of cemetery flowers.

"She must be in the back," Mary whispered, "else she would've said something by now." Mary stepped quietly to the lunch counter and shot Annie an impatient frown. The scents of bath soaps and powders attracted Annie as she passed the display, but she dared not to touch them. "Maybe we should just buy something."

"What for? You scared?"

Annie straightened. "Do I look scared?"

"Like you gone pass a watermelon. Just do like I do. She gone to be scareder than us."

The storage room door behind the lunch counter was open. A low voice came from the room, and suddenly they heard a long moan, as if someone, or some animal, were grieving.

"Jesus," whispered Annie. She pulled on Mary's elbow.

Mary pushed closer to the counter, took a deep breath, and pulled herself up onto the first stool. She sat for a moment, her eyes as excited as a child's on a fairground ride. "You ever sit on one of these?" She caught herself for being too loud. She put on a serious face, her lips folded under so as not to look too big, placed her feet on the shiny circular footrest, and adjusted her skirt.

Annie looked over her shoulder, expecting to see Mrs. May's stick-like figure marching hurriedly toward them, but all was still except for the putt-putting of the ceiling fans.

Mary beckoned to Annie to sit on the stool beside her, and gingerly as a child testing hot bathwater, Annie sat. She pulled herself up on the stool, forgetting to smooth her skirt as Mary had done. She sat ready to jump down at any moment; when the moan came again, she jumped.

"Be there in a minute," drawled a woman from the storage room. It was not Mrs. May's voice, which was thin and whiny. A heavy woman, dressed in a blue calico shift with a lace collar safety-pinned at the neck, stepped from the storage room. Her gray curls were pulled back. Her face looked soft, and her eyes were large and round. When she saw the girls, the woman looked confused for a moment, then she looked frightened and wrung her hands. "May I help ya?" she asked.

Annie looked at Mary, and Mary at Annie. They had never seen this woman before. After a moment, Mary drew a breath and said, "We would like to order." The woman pointed to the menu and stood back as if ready to retreat into the storage room. The moan came again from the room.

"We don't want no takeout," Mary said, growing bolder. "We want to eat at the counter like white folks. We want you to write it down on your little pad and bring us silverware wrapped in a napkin."

"But . . ." the woman said, and then she blanched. "But . . ."

The moan came again, loudly. She returned to the storage room.

When the woman came back she was shaking. "I . . . I can't serve colored."

"Why can't choo?" Mary said. She tried to sound sophisticated. "You have the food. You have the stove. All we want is a hamburger and some fries." She pointed to the orangeade. "And some of that orange drink."

The woman came slowly to Annie. Nervously, she put her hand out to the edge of the counter like she wanted to touch Annie. "I don't want trouble, miss," she said. "I'm just helping out my sister-in-law, Ella May. She's very sick, you know. She's got a gall bladder. I'm not even from here. I'm from West Virginia. I don't want any trouble."

"Yes, ma'am," Annie said, then cleared her throat, took a deep breath, and fought to control her jittery voice. "We just want our rights."

"Listen," the woman said, "I will give you some food if you'll just take it on home." The she added in a whisper, "Mr. May will be back from the hospital soon and . . . please . . ."

"No," Mary said firmly, crisping her endings the way their English teacher Miss Bullock had told them was proper. "We done come all the way from Washington, D.C. We are part of President Johnson's civil rights committee. And we gone report you to the Doctor Martin Luther King."

The woman stepped back from the counter. She bumped against the ice cream box. She seemed not to believe Mary but was too afraid to say otherwise. "Mr. May will return soon," she said, too uncertain to be threatening. She strained to see out the front door. Annie knew she was looking to see if somebody white was out there, and spun in a sudden fright. Two black boys were brushing hayseed from their hair in front of the window.

"If it were up to me . . ." the woman said. "If it were up to me, I would be glad to serve you. I don't mind colored. Honest. I'm from West Virginia."

"It *is* up to you," Mary said, a crooked, dimpled smile on her face. "Who else is here? How come you don't want us Negroes to have our rights?"

"Please," the woman said, clasping her hands together, "I don't want to have to call the police. Don't make me call nobody." She strained again to see the street.

The moan came again. No one moved. They let the moan and the putt-putt of the fans bathe them. Annie felt the moan in the pit of her stomach. She held onto the seat of her stool. Maybe Mrs. May was dead, she thought, and someone was crying. They shouldn't be causing this trouble if Mrs. May was dead. "Well, maybe we should come back when Mrs. May is here," Annie said vacantly, all the time moving a little ways down the counter, focused on the crack in the doorway to the storage room. She could only see a bare light bulb and switch cord and cans on the shelves.

"I'm not taking a step until I get served," Mary said. "I don't care if Miss May—if the owner—ain't here. You in charge and I want my rights."

The woman put her hand out to Annie. "What if I made you a nice sandwich and you can take it with you? I'll let you have it free of charge."

"Ain't that some mess?" Mary said, putting her hands on her hips. "You even *give* us food, but you don't want us to sit and eat it like people. You rather see us go out back and eat it like a dog. I know how you white people is. I done seen it. You have your damn dog eat at the table with you, but you won't let a colored person. Do I look like a dog to you?"

"I don't own a dog," the woman said. She no longer wrung her hands but gripped one inside the other. "I don't own this place. I'm just helping my sister-in-law like I told you. And besides, it is the law. Like I told you, I got nothing against you. Not in the least. But what would Mrs. May or Mr. May say if they walked in here and I was letting you eat? They wouldn't like it."

"I don't care what they like. The customer is always right."

The moan came again, this time discernible as a word: "Maaahhma."

"What's that?" Mary asked, her eyes wide.

"It's nothing to you," the woman said.

Annie saw a movement, a shadow, behind the door. It was a slow, awkward swaying. The door squeaked and moved slightly. Annie looked first at Mary and then at the woman.

"I'll tell you what *is* my business," Mary said. "This here piece of pie is. And I got a good mind to help myself to it right now." She reached out for the lid of the pie plate.

"Don't let me have to call somebody."

"Call who you like. I ain't scared. I'll go to jail if I have to."

“Don’t be ugly,” the woman said and waved her hand. She might have been snatching a fly out of orbit. “Just take it and go.”

The moan came again, deep and pathetic. It reminded Annie of the mourning doves that she could hear from her bedroom window just after sunrise, only it was not so melodic as doves.

“Go!” the woman shouted. “You’re upsetting him.”

The shadow swayed again, and the door, squeaking, was pulled open farther. Annie moved closer to the door, directly in front of it, separated from it only by the counter gate. She knew there was someone there, some “him” the woman had said, but something monstrously sorrowful and she couldn’t imagine what it was.

Mary hopped down from the stool. “I told you I wanted it here.” She jabbed her finger into the countertop. “Why don’t you admit it? You just like every white person I ever seen. Just as prejudice’ as the day is long.”

“I’m not!” the woman said. “You don’t understand the position I’m in . . .”

“Maaaaahhhmmaaa.”

“I’m coming.” The woman made a step toward the door, then she turned back to Mary. “I’m not prejudice’.” Her face was contorted. The moan came again, with a resonating bass. “Baby,” the woman said to the figure behind the door, and then to Mary, “eat here, then. Eat all you want. I don’t care.”

Mary stood stiffly, smiled. There was a small silence. “Serve me,” she demanded.

“Serve your goddamn self,” the older woman said, her voice rising to a screech.

Annie heard the argument, and glanced now and again at Mary and the woman, but now the door was slowly swinging open, and she could see the thick fingers of a man holding onto the edge of it. He was a big man. Big and fat like the sheriff. Annie looked at the woman. She felt her lips part. The moan, almost a groan, vibrated in her chest. The man was like an animal, a hurt animal, calling for his mother, Annie thought. Now she was afraid in a different way. She remembered what her father had told her about hurt animals, how they turned on people who tried to help them, how their mothers attacked ferociously to save them.

“Serve yourself.” The woman had turned toward Mary. Her entire body trembled, her hands, now unclasped, fanned the air. She pushed a loaf of sandwich bread across the counter toward Mary. She slapped a package of hamburger buns, causing it to sail and hit Mary on the shoulder. She threw Dixie cups, plastic forks and paper napkins. Mary ducked below the countertop. “Serve yourself,” the woman screamed. “Eat all the goddamn food you want.”

"Maaahhma."

Stepping cautiously as if walking up to a lame wild dog, Annie slipped through the counter gate. The door pulled all the way open and the man stood there. Annie's heart skipped a beat; she reached back for the counter so she wouldn't fall. First she saw a barrel chest, bulging out in odd places under a pinned-together plaid flannel shirt; then his thick neck, stiffly twisted so that one ear nearly lay against his hulking shoulder. His lips were thick and flat. One side of his face was higher than the other, like a clay face misshapen by a child's hand. His eyebrows were thick ridges that ran together at the top of his wide flat nose.

"Maaaaahhmmaaa."

"He's just a baby," the woman came to the door and took the man's hand. She pulled him into the open, behind the counter, and rubbed the back of his hand furiously. His presence seemed to calm her. She glanced toward Mary and then to Annie. "It's the new place." She smiled as if inviting a stranger to look at an infant, then shot a look at Mary. "He's not used to being over here." She patted the hand and the big man smiled deep dimples. She pinched his cheeks. "Just a baby."

"What's wrong with him?" Annie asked, recovering from the sight of him.

The mother sighed. "Just born thatta way, child. Just born like that." She looked back at Mary who was straightening her clothes and wig. "Maybe we'll all sit and have a piece of pie."

The man smiled at Annie, and Annie managed to smile back. She reached behind her for the counter gate.

"Don't worry," the woman said. "He is as gentle as a fly. He likes to be around people." She changed to baby talk. "Don't you, Willie?" Then she held out the man's hand to Annie. "Here. Pat the back of his hand. That's what he likes."

Annie looked at his face, drool in the corners of his mouth. He had gray eyes that swam lazily in their sockets. Now she looked at the offered hand. It was the whitest hand that she had ever seen, with thick, hairy knuckles and nubbed nails.

"Go on and pat him," the woman said. "He's just a boy—your age. Go on, he likes it."

She had never touched a white boy. She reached out for the hand hesitantly. The woman encouraged. Annie wanted to look at Mary, to see what she thought, but she could not break her focus on the man's hand. She saw her hand, so obviously brown, move into her focus, and then move closer to the pale hand until her fingertips touched it.

"Go ahead and give him a pat."

The man’s hand was soft and damp, unlike any hand Annie had ever touched. She lifted her hand and patted the big hand twice, and then twice again. The man moaned, not any word but like a dog enjoying a belly rub.

“See,” the woman said. She looked at Mary. “See. We are just people like you are. We don’t want to hurt nobody. Not a soul.” She took back the man’s hand and smiled at Annie. “Tell you what. I’ll cut us all a piece of pie.”

“Can we have it at the counter?” Mary glared at the woman, her lips poked out.

The woman sighed loudly. “Won’t you understand?”

“Then eat it by yo’self.”

The woman turned to Annie and touched her hand, “Won’t *you* understand?”

Annie hesitated. The doorbell jingled and Mr. May came in. He was wiping his straw fedora with a handkerchief. “I’ll be glad if that old witch did die,” he was saying as he made his way to the back.

Mary spun around and pretended to be interested in the bath soaps. “You being he’ped?” he asked gruffly as he approached her.

“Yes, suh,” Mary said.

The woman was trying to push the man back into the storage room. Mr. May stopped and put his hands on his hips. “Damn, Sally, what is he doing out in the store? He’s liable to scare someone to death . . . and what! . . . in the hell is that gal doing *behind* the counter?”

“It’s all right.” The woman turned and waved Annie through the counter gate. “She was just helping me with him.”

“Look at this place? What the hell happened here? Goddamnit, can’t you control that freak?”

“It’s all right,” the woman said from inside the room where she was pushing the man. “Y’all run along now.”

“That wasn’t fair,” Mary said as they walked back to the Fairlane. “How come that stupid gorilla had to be there? How come *she* had to be there in the first place? Ole lady May the one I wanted to be there. I could have said something if it hada been her.” Annie said nothing. They passed the monument to the Confederate dead, standing in the courthouse yard.

"I don't know," Annie said. She was beginning to tremble on the inside. The world seemed complex and uncertain. She remembered touching the man, her brown hand against his white one. He was like a baby, soft and damp, and yet something about him, not just his size and his twisted face, frightened her. But she had been charmed by him for a moment, charmed by his softness and his dimples. She remembered the look on the woman's face when she patted the man's hand. She thought the woman had loved her for a moment.

"We never gone get our rights." Mary clenched her teeth. "Especially with you around pattin' the goddamn monster on the hand."

"What was wrong with that?" Annie said. She knew there was nothing wrong with it. He couldn't help the way he was born.

"If you don't know . . . !" Mary reached out quickly and pinched Annie on the arm just above the elbow. She squeezed her nails into the pinch and twisted it before she let go. "Some civil rights marcher you is. Bill Green will be 'shame' to know you."

Annie whimpered and put her hand over the pinched spot. "No!" she blurted, "I *want* my rights."

"Shit." Mary took Annie by the elbow and led her to the car. "I know you was tryin' . . . I know . . . it's just that we won't ever get nothing, nothing—unless we, we . . . uggghhh!"—she grimaced—"*kill* them, or something."

They reached the car and got in, then Annie began to cry. Mary touched her hand to comfort her, but Annie pushed her away. Mary sped the car out of town on a road that cut through fields turning brown in the hot autumn sun. Annie put her head on the dash. Things were very complicated, far more complicated than she had ever thought.

A Call for Unity

A GROUP OF CLERGYMEN

Birmingham, Alabama was the scene of perhaps the most significant campaign of the Civil Rights Movement, not least because it catapulted Martin Luther King Jr. to national prominence. King and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) had been invited to Birmingham, one of the nation's most segregated cities, by the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, whose own efforts to negotiate desegregation with the city's business leaders and government officials had failed. In the spring of 1963, King and the SCLC carefully orchestrated a program of nonviolent demonstrations and sit-ins, targeting downtown businesses and white churches, hoping to gain national public attention and sympathy, and eventually federal intervention, should their direct action produce a violent counter-reaction from the authorities—as indeed it did. On April 10, 1963, the city issued an injunction barring the demonstrations, which King and the demonstrators ignored: nonviolent resistance now included direct civil disobedience. On April 12, King was among the 50 people arrested and jailed for defying the city's injunction.

The next day, a group of eight moderate white Alabama clergymen published this open letter, criticizing the confrontational demonstrations (and King, though not by name) and calling instead for negotiations (a new, less combative mayor was just taking office). (The group had earlier that year published "An Appeal for Law and Order and Common Sense," which urged the use of the courts to correct bad laws and called for obedience to the laws until they are legally overturned.) The next day, King answered "A Call for Unity" with his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (next selection).

Why do the clergymen regard the demonstrations as "unwise and untimely"? Why do they object to the involvement of "outsiders" (a clear reference to King and the SCLC) in the affairs of their city? What do they mean by calling the demonstrations "extreme measures"? What are they worried about for their city? What do they mean by "actions as incite to hatred and violence, however technically peaceful those actions may be"? Granting the clergymen the benefit of any doubts regarding the decency of their motives, and imagining yourself as a contemporary reader of their "call to unity," what can you say in favor *of their position? Before reading King's critical response to the clergyman, try formulating* your own *rebuttal.*

We the undersigned clergymen are among those who, in January, issued "An Appeal for Law and Order and Common Sense," in dealing with racial problems in Alabama. We expressed understanding that honest convictions in racial matters could properly be pursued in the courts, but urged that decisions of those courts should in the meantime be peacefully obeyed.

Since that time there has been some evidence of increased forbearance and a willingness to face facts. Responsible citizens have undertaken to work on various problems which cause racial friction and unrest. In Birmingham, recent public events

have given indication that we all have opportunity for a new constructive and realistic approach to racial problems.

However, we are now confronted by a series of demonstrations by some of our Negro citizens, directed and led in part by outsiders. We recognize the natural impatience of people who feel that their hopes are slow in being realized. But we are convinced that these demonstrations are unwise and untimely.

We agree rather with certain local Negro leadership which has called for honest and open negotiation of racial issues in our area. And we believe this kind of facing of issues can best be accomplished by citizens of our own metropolitan area, white and Negro, meeting with their knowledge and experiences of the local situation. All of us need to face that responsibility and find proper channels for its accomplishment.

Just as we formerly pointed out that "hatred and violence have no sanction in our religious and political traditions," we also point out that such actions as incite to hatred and violence, however technically peaceful those actions may be, have not contributed to the resolution of our local problems. We do not believe that these days of new hope are days when extreme measures are justified in Birmingham.

We commend the community as a whole, and the local news media and law enforcement officials in particular, on the calm manner in which these demonstrations have been handled. We urge the public to continue to show restraint should the demonstrations continue, and the law enforcement officials to remain calm and continue to protect our city from violence.

We further strongly urge our own Negro community to withdraw support from these demonstrations, and to unite locally in working peacefully for a better Birmingham. When rights are consistently denied, a cause should be pressed in the courts and in negotiations among local leaders, and not in the streets. We appeal to both our white and Negro citizenry to observe the principles of law and order and common sense.

Signed by:

C.C.J. CARPENTER, D.D., LL.D., *Bishop of Alabama*.

JOSEPH A. DURICK, D.D., *Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Mobile-Birmingham*

Rabbi MILTON L. GRAFMAN, *Temple Emanu-El, Birmingham, Alabama*

Bishop PAUL HARDIN, *Bishop of the Alabama-West Florida Conference of the Methodist Church*

Bishop NOLAN B. HARMON, *Bishop of the North Alabama Conference of the Methodist Church*

GEORGE M. MURRAY, D.D., LL.D., *Bishop Coadjutor, Episcopal Diocese of Alabama*

EDWARD V. RAMAGE, *Moderator, Synod of the Alabama Presbyterian Church in the United States*

EARL STALLINGS, *Pastors, First Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama*

Letter from Birmingham Jail

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

As noted in the introduction to the previous selection, King wrote this letter on April 16, 1963, in response to "A Call for Unity," a letter that had been published three days earlier by eight politically moderate white clergymen opposing the tactics of direct action and civil disobedience. King's incarceration caused local and national consternation, and his release was effected on April 20th by the intervention of President John F. Kennedy. His letter from jail, written on scraps of newspaper and handed out in bits and pieces to his supporters who assembled them into a coherent and eloquent argument, was published in several magazines in May and June, and did a great deal to enhance King's reputation and national following. (Recall that the March on Washington took place that same year, in late August.)

Going carefully through the letter, topic by topic, present and evaluate King's response to the clergymen. Which arguments, in each case, do you find most—and which least—persuasive or moving? Consider in addition these questions, pertinent to the tactics of direct action and (especially) civil disobedience: Is King right, in answering the charge that he is an outsider, that injustice in any community in the United States is everyone's proper business, or might there be reasons, in our federal republic, for allowing local communities to sort out their own affairs? King says that the purpose of his nonviolent direct action program "is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation." What are the benefits and risks of such an approach to seeking political change? In offering his eloquent defense of civil disobedience,[48] King justifies his willingness to break laws by claiming that one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws, those that are out of harmony with "the moral law or the law of God." Can we citizens of a pluralistic society know with certainty—and agree—on the content of the moral law or the law of God? Although King accepts the charge that he is "an extremist"—like Jesus and Amos and Martin Luther—he also presents himself as a moderate, and as the only alternative between do-nothing complacency and separatist, violent black nationalism. How can he be both extremist and moderate? What do you make of King's views about the proper role of the churches in the struggle for civil rights, and how do they fit with the American principles regarding the separation of church and state?

My Dear Fellow Clergymen:

While confined here in the Birmingham City Jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk,

[48] *Readers interested in thinking more about the general subject should consult the opposing views of Henry David Thoreau, "On Civil Disobedience," www.constitution.org/civ/civildis.htm, and Abraham Lincoln's Speech to the Young Men's Lyceum, www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/the-perpetuation-of-our-political-institutions.*

my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statements in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

Read the letter here: www.stanford.edu/group/King/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf.

Address to the 1964 National Baptist Convention

JOSEPH H. JACKSON

Not all African American leaders interested in advancing the cause of African Americans approved of Martin Luther King Jr.'s strategies of direct action and civil disobedience. A highly prominent example, now almost forgotten, was the Reverend Joseph H. Jackson (1905?–90). Jackson rose from the hardship of his early life in Mississippi to become pastor of the historic Olivet Baptist Church in Chicago, and eventually served as president of the National Baptist Convention from 1953–82, longer than any one before or since. Jackson had supported King (including financially) during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, but the two men fell out over Baptist Convention politics; and Jackson fully separated himself from King once King's nonviolent resistance embraced also civil disobedience. In this speech, delivered in 1964 at the annual National Baptist Convention, Jackson emphasizes instead a strategy reminiscent of Booker T. Washington, the most prominent black leader at the turn of the twentieth century, who had counseled his black brethren to befriend people of all races and to advance themselves through education, self-discipline, and persistent hard work in industry, commerce, service, and the professions. Yet more like King than like Washington, Jackson also stresses the importance of gaining civil and political rights.

Both King and Jackson were strongly identified Christian leaders. But whereas King had sought to hold America accountable to Jesus' teaching and the principles of Christian love, Jackson begins by saying that "As Christians, we are a part of our nation and a part of the struggle of America," and he makes no specifically religious, but only patriotic and civic, arguments. Like King, Jackson appeals to the Constitution and the principles of the Declaration of Independence, but unlike King, he staunchly favored obedience to the laws as written, and he emphasizes the Declaration's rights of individuals rather than, like King, the brotherly community founded in love. How does Jackson understand the struggle for civil rights? What, concretely, is his specific advice to African Americans? What does he mean by "direct action in the positive"? Imagining yourself as an auditor of Jackson's speech, what in it do you find persuasive? With what do you disagree?

Participating in the Struggle of America

As Christians we are a part of our nation and a part of the struggle of America. America was brought into being to satisfy and to answer the human longing for freedom. There was the urge in man to be related to other men as men without a modifier or any kind of limitation or restriction. There was an awareness of a human kinship deeper than race, more profound than nationality, and more inclusive than any accepted religious creed. In addition to the quest for a new geographical spot there was a search for a new human relationship, a new freedom, and new opportunities. These basic urges inspired the early colonies to brave the dangers of a rough and unknown sea, and seek a land in which they could live as free men and aspire to the highest possible goals of life without the

enslavement of the past or being the victims of the determinism of enforced circumstances. They wanted a chance to explore and to search out the meaning of life for themselves, and an opportunity to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience.

They soon became convinced that there was no such land, no such Utopia, but all they would find would be an opportunity to make such a land and such a country. They were convinced it could be made out of the desires that now possessed their souls and out of the thirst for liberty that dominated their lives.

America was born in a struggle and as a struggle for freedom, and for the opportunity to develop the highest resources of mankind. The Declaration of Independence and the Federal Constitution were the results of our fathers' attempts to put on paper the ideals that inspired the birth of the nation, and those principles by which and on which the nation was erected and sustained. There have been errors, mistakes, and gross sins committed against this American venture, but this high venture has not been repudiated or negated. The Massachusetts theocracy became oppressive and hostile toward freedom. Some human beings were slain in the episode of the great Witch Hunt. Slavery took its toll, denying to thousands the human dignity that God had bestowed upon them; and as a result of the defense of this cruel institution, the nation was divided into two armed camps, and a cruel civil war saw Americans take the lives of Americans, and brothers shedding their brothers' blood. But from the dust and dirt of this tragic event the American ideals sprang up again with new vigor and vitality, and continued its upward march on the rough highway of human history. This American venture is powerful but not perfect; ever growing but not grown; and still becoming, but is not yet complete. The kind hand of destiny and the benevolent providence of Almighty God have placed the American Negro along with other races and nationalities in this flowing stream of the nation's life for which we are justly proud. As patriotic Americans we are devoted to our nation's cause, and are wedded to its ideals and principles. By precept and example, by instinct and intuition, we now know the difference between that which is truly American and that which is not. We draw a clear distinction between that which is germane to the nation's life and that which is foreign, hostile, and antagonistic to the soul of our nation. To the former we pledge our total allegiance and commit every ounce of energy, our strength, all of our powers, and even our very lives. But against the latter we stand with uncompromising determination, and will not rest until all the enemies of our nation have been subdued and conquered. This is the true meaning of the civil rights struggle.

The Civil Rights Struggle

Much time and space is given in the public press to the problem of civil rights. It has engaged the minds of our congressmen, and has occasioned many days of debate and deliberation. In the name of civil rights thousands have marched through the streets of our cities, boycotts have been staged, picket lines have been thrown around places of businesses, institutions of learning; and in every nook and corner of the country voices have been heard in the defense of and in the interest of civil rights.

What is this struggle for civil rights? I answer, it is an effort of American citizens to get full equality of opportunity. It is the resolution and the determination that there shall be in these United States one class of citizens and that is first class citizens. This is a struggle to adopt in practice as well as theory the concept of man on which the Declaration of Independence is based, and to fully implement the Federal Constitution, one of the greatest documents for human freedom since the writing of the Magna Carta. The civil rights struggle is a struggle for full freedom, justice, and equality before the law. It is a struggle to bring from paper the lofty ideals of America, and to apply them in practice to the lives and actions of all Americans. In reality it is America's struggle to be herself, to fulfill the highest promises of her being, and to build a social order after the pattern and dreams of our founding fathers and in the light of the wisdom of the ages.

The civil rights struggle then is not a struggle to negate the high and lofty philosophy of American freedom. It is not an attempt to convert the nation into an armed camp or to substitute panic and anarchy in the place of law and order. It is in no wise an attempt to negate or to amend downward the highest laws of this land proclaiming freedom and justice for all.

Why Then the Struggle?

The answer is there is a group in the United States that believes that when the constitution speaks of the rights of American citizens it meant only men whose skins were white. This group believes in segregation as a means of protecting the best interests of the nation and of keeping the races separate and pure. But as we look at the degrees of pigmentation among all the races in these United States, I ask my segregationist friends, don't you think it is rather late now to talk about the purity of the race; for the blood of white segregationists is in the veins of many whom they would ostracize, and their kinship is a biological fact. Many segregationists fear that granting equality of opportunity to people of color will in some way jeopardize their liberties, encroach upon their freedom, and threaten their rank, position, and security. But such fear is unfounded if the doctrine of American democracy is true. For no free man has any grounds to fear the spread of the privileges of true freedom to all men, for the greater the number of free men the more secure is freedom and less is the power and danger of oppression. Abraham Lincoln sensed this fact when he said: "By giving freedom to the slaves we insure freedom to the free." The presence of one bound man pollutes the whole stream of human society; and the rattle of one chain of oppression creates a discord that breaks the harmony in every democratic system, and disturbs the mind and poisons the heart of every man with fear and dread, so that the would-be master finds himself mentally and morally the dweller in the hovels of slaves, the servant of a cause that is hostile to democracy, and becomes himself, the victim of the baser emotions of his own nature.

This struggle for civil rights has remained for a hundred years because there are persons among us who are still the victims of the psychology of chattel slavery and are yet blinded to the verdict of history and indifferent to the logic of life, and in deep rebellion against the voice of God. Some believe that their very future and the future well-being of their families depend on keeping alive the cursed demon of segregation. In

the language of one segregationist: "Yes, we believe in segregation, and we will not be changed. We will not be frightened or forced. We will oppose you with every ounce of strength that we have. We will fight you from breakfast until noon. We will eat our noon-day meal and then return to the field of battle and fight you until sunset. If opportunity permits we will catch a bite to eat in the twilight and return to our post and fight until the morning comes." With such determination, with such faith in the way of segregation, with such commitment to the evils of discrimination, and with such opponents of democracy and freedom, it is no surprise that the struggle for civil rights has remained so long and still remains one of the grave struggles of the land and country.

The second reason why the struggle for civil rights has continued is that the segregated does not and cannot accept segregation as a way of life. The bound men have read with care the great promises of our Federal Constitution, and they have heard clearly the pronouncements of statesmen, and have followed the logic of every philosopher of freedom, and they now know that segregation and racial discrimination have no logical or legitimate place in the American character and constitution. The segregated is just as determined to destroy the awful demand of racial segregation as segregationists are to keep it alive.

This struggle will continue because of the inner nature of the segregated themselves. There has been implanted in the hearts and minds of all men the hope, the love, and expectation of freedom, and this inner conviction compels us, and the freedom of soul constrains us so that we cannot rest in chains or be at peace in a house of bondage, or compromise with the dungeons of discrimination and accept as our lot the cruel and oppressive hand of those heartless masters who allow pigmentation of skin to blind them to the inner principles of truth and to the revealed purposes of God. The struggle goes on because two determinations meet: one; to enslave, and the other; to be free, and here can be no compromise, and from the task of solving the problem of freedom there must be no retreat.

Some Suggestions to the American Negro

But we as a people must keep ever before us the true meaning of our struggle so that we will never be used as tools in the hands of those who love not the nation's cause but seek the nation's hurt and not our help. Hence there are some things that we must do.

1. In our struggle for civil rights we must remain always in the mainstream of American democracy. Our cause must never be divorced from the American cause, and our struggle must not be separated from the American struggle. We must stick to law and order, for as I have said in the past I say now, there are no problems in American life that cannot be solved through commitment to the highest laws of our land and in obedience to the American philosophy and way of life. In spite of criticisms and not-with-standing threats and open attacks, I have not retreated from this position and never will as long as America is the America of the Federal Constitution and a land of due process of law. We cannot win our battle through force and unreasonable intimidation. As a minority group we cannot win outside of the protection and power of the just laws of this land. Read

history with open eyes and attentive minds, and we will discover that no minority group has and can win in a struggle by the direct confrontation of the majority and by employing the same type of pressures and powers that the majority possess in abundance. The hope of the minority struggle is with the just laws of the land and the moral and constructive forces that are germane to this nation's life and character.

While we must be determined to achieve the best, we must not be guided by a spirit of revenge, blind emotions, and uncontrolled temper. When we act by these baser emotions we find ourselves contradicting ourselves. We will deny freedom of speech to those who differ with us, and will seek to do the things that will embarrass others however costly it may be to us and to them. When we are guided by revenge we do not choose our program of action wisely. There are some groups who are thus motivated, will go in, sit in, or lie in, in places that have objected to their presence. These same groups when they are dissatisfied in places that have accepted them, will give up their achieved rights and walk out in protest and revenge. Our actions must be guided both by logic and by law.

2. The methods that we employ in the present struggle must not lead us into open opposition to the laws of the land. In some cases the technique of direct action and demonstrations have led to mob violence and to vandalism. At least some who have desired to practice these negative methods have used the technique of so-called direct action. . . .

3. Negroes must become registered voters and fight their battles in the polling booth. In the coming campaign we must not allow our prejudices, our hatred for individuals, to lead us into emotional outbursts and disrespect. The candidates contending for the presidency of the United States deserve, and should enjoy, the respect from every American citizen. It is beneath the dignity of this fair land of ours to seek to howl down, and to boo from platforms any candidate whom we do not favor. We must make choice of the candidate whom we think will serve the best interest of this nation and the nation's cause, and then take our ballot and help to elect our choice. As I told this convention in 1956, I tell you again, the ballot is our most important weapon. We must not neglect it, forfeit or sell it, but use it for the protection of the nation, the promotion of freedom, the promotion of every citizen, and for the glory of the United States of America. What I said in 1956 I still say now.

4. Negroes must still make their own leaders. We must not expect the public press, radio, and television to do this job for us. These news media are too busy with other responsibilities to be assigned the task of choosing Negro leaders to represent the race in these days of stress and strain. Negroes must not forget that we have many fields in which leaders are necessary and important, and we should accept and follow the leaders in their respective field; that is, when they are right. We have political leaders, many of whom are worthy of our confidence and our respect. We shall follow them and show our appreciation for them. We have some dedicated civil rights leaders. We should respect them and follow them in their chosen field when they are right. We have religious leaders. We should respect and follow them when they are committed to the task of

human betterment, human uplift, and the work of re-making the social order in the name of justice, righteousness, and peace.

We have worthy business leaders who can show us the way to improve our economic status, and to develop our available economic resources. Let us follow them. We have educators who are making their contribution in the field of thought and of mental growth. Let us honor them and respect them, and let us not discourage Negro educators by advocating directly or indirectly, that they are by nature inferior to educators in other racial groups.

We have athletes and comedians. Let us still applaud our athletes when they achieve on the field of competition, and let us join with others and freely laugh at the jokes that our comedians give. But we must not confuse these various fields. There must not develop any dictatorship of any one field, and athletes and comedians must not make the mistake of assuming the role of political, religious, and cultural leaders. We as a race must see to it that each man serves in his field, and we must not allow the white community to pick our leaders or to tell us what Negro we should follow.

5. Let us be courageous enough not only to oppose the wrong and the un-American actions in our nation, but we must also appreciate and rejoice in the achievements of our nation. There are some recent achievements which give us reason for hope, grounds for trust, and basis for rejoicing.

Ten years ago the Supreme Court of the United States rose above its old concept of separate but equal, and declared that segregation had no place in America's system of public education. This year, after a long, hard, and laborious fight, the Congress of the United States passed the strongest civil rights bill in its history, and the president signed into law a document that said that segregation has no place in American life and destiny. The call is to all of us to accept these facts and build on them. We must not ignore the constructive laws of our land, we must not organize, condone, or support mobs that parade in the name of freedom. We must not turn aside from decency and the constructive American standards in our quest for freedom. In our haste let us not be haughty. In our determination we must not become detrimental, and in our demonstrations we cannot afford to damn the nation of which we are a vital part.

Direct Action in the Positive

We have heard much in recent months about direct action in terms of boycotts, pickets, sit-ins, and demonstrations of various kinds. In each case the purpose as stated is a lofty one; namely, the winning of civil rights and the achievement of the equality of opportunity. I repeat, these are worthy ends and desirable goals, but this kind of direct action is orientated against others, and for the most part, must be classified in the negative since they have been designed to stop, arrest, or hinder certain orderly procedures in the interest of civil rights. In some cases however, these actions have been against practices and laws considered to be both evil and unjust.

Today, I call for another type of direct action; that is, direct action in the positive which is orientated towards the Negro's ability, talent, genius, and capacity. Let us take our economic resources, however insignificant and small, and organize and harness them, not to stop the economic growth of others, but to develop our own and to help our own community. If our patronage withdrawn from any store or business enterprise will weaken said enterprise, why not organize these resources and channel them into producing enterprises that we ourselves can direct and control. In the act of boycotting, our best economic talents are not called into play, and we ourselves are less productive and seek to render others the same. Why not build for ourselves instead of boycotting what others have produced? We must not be guilty of possessing the minds and actions of a blind Sampson who pulled a massive building down upon himself as well as his enemies, and died with them in a final act of revenge. No act of revenge will lift a race from thralldom, and any direct actions that reduce the economic strength and life of the community is sure to punish the poor as well as the rich. Direct actions that encourage and create more tensions, ill will, hostility, and hate, will tend to make more difficult the mental, moral, and spiritual changes essential to new growth and creativity in human relations. Remember that when we seek to change certain acquired notions and habits of men we are seeking to change that which is very vital in human nature. When we labor to change segregationists and racists who believe they are right, we are facing the task of re-conditioning human emotions and building within new patterns of thought, and changing human nature itself. In addition to that type of direct action which is negative and aimed at the correction of others, we need the type of direct action also that starts with ourselves which tends to produce a higher type of life within us as well as within others, and which aims to build a better community in which the available moral forces may be used to create new attitudes and new dispositions where human beings will regard others as they regard themselves. Why should we expect direct actions against others to bear immediate fruit, and then procrastinate and postpone the direct actions that will make us better business men, better statesmen, better thinkers, and better men and women with better homes and better fellowship NOW? Now must not only be applied to the needs for changes and attitudes of segregationists, it must also be applied to us as a people and as a race when we aspire for the best and seek the more constructive and creative methods of life. We can be better now. We can acquire a better education now, we can organize our capital now and receive our share in this economy of free enterprise now. In spite of all that we have attained as a people we have not exhausted our possibilities, and the past does not define the limits of our potential. Are we not as well equipped to respond to the call of the right, the just, the good, the highest, and the best as are the white segregationists against whom we fight? Has not the great God put in our souls the thirst for truth and righteousness? Are we not endowed as co-workers with the great creative spirit of the universe? Then we need not wait until all is well before we harness our resources and venture upon new ways of life and creativity.

We must not play ourselves too cheap or postpone the day of greater things when the hour of fulfillment is already at hand. To the leaders of school boycotts who have called children to remain out of school in order to help correct the evils and errors of an imperfect system of education, are you willing now to use your influence to lead young people to desert the ranks of drop-outs and struggle now to make the best out of the

education that is now available? The call to stay out of school does not appeal to the highest in students but to the ordinary and the easy. It requires less initiative to stay out of school than it does to attend school. It requires less mental alertness to refuse to study than it does to study. Is not some education better than no education? Of course we should get all the education possible and go as far up the ladder of intellectual attainments as our powers will allow us. We must strive for the very best opportunities, the best possible schools, and the best possible teachers, but if these are not available to us then let us make the best use of what we do have. Remember that the future is with the person who knows, thinks, understands, and who has character and soul, and who can produce, invest, create and live in harmony with the highest and the best. Of course we adults must continue to correct all the evils which make education more difficult. We must strive for quality education and seek to make available all the resources possible for the education of the young, but our young people must keep their feet in the upward path of learning and their minds stayed on the quest for truth.

The progress of the race lies not in continued street demonstrations, and the liberation of an oppressed people shall not come by acts of revenge and retaliation but by the constructive use of all available opportunities and a creative expansion of the circumstances of the past into stepping stones to higher things.

The Ballot or the Bullet

MALCOLM X

At the same time that King and his followers were practicing nonviolent direct action to awaken the conscience of the nation, a different—and more radical—strategy for improving the lives of African Americans was being advanced by Malcolm X (born Malcolm Little in 1925; died, as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabaz, in 1965). After a dissolute life lived on the edge (described in his 1965 Autobiography of Malcolm X*), Malcolm came to prominence once he joined the Nation of Islam (NOI) and, as its most articulate public spokesman, began spreading its teaching of black supremacy and black separatism. Disillusioned with NOI's founder, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm left the organization in March 1964, and within the year, after a trip to Mecca and a conversion to the "true Islam," he publicly renounced racialist thinking and embraced a multi-racial search for human betterment. Before he had a chance to develop his programmatic ideas in America, he was assassinated in February 1965 by members of the NOI. Malcolm's greatest speech, here selected, was given in Cleveland on April 3, 1964, shortly after his break with Elijah Muhammad—seven months after the March on Washington and three months before the passage of the Civil Rights Act.*[49]

What does Malcolm X mean by presenting, as the exclusive *alternatives available to black Americans, "the ballot or the bullet"? What does he mean by saying that "a ballot is like a bullet"? Why does he reject the call for* "civil *rights," in favor of "*human *rights"? What is the philosophy—political, economic, and social—of black nationalism? Is Malcolm X right in claiming that American blacks are really Africans, and nothing but Africans? Why does Malcolm X object to the teaching and tactics of nonviolence, and why does he call the gospel of Christ "white nationalism"? Whereas King and Jackson explicitly appeal to American principles and the Constitution, Malcolm X does not. To what extent is Malcolm's position philosophically compatible with American principles and law? To what extent do his black nationalist teachings provide a successful strategy for black Americans? For the country as a whole?*

Mr. Moderator, Brother Lomax,[50] brothers and sisters, friends and enemies: I just can't believe everyone in here is a friend, and I don't want to leave anybody out. The question tonight, as I understand it, is "The Negro Revolt, and Where Do We Go From Here?" or What Next?" In my little humble way of understanding it, it points toward either the ballot or the bullet.

Before we try and explain what is meant by the ballot or the bullet, I would like to clarify something concerning myself. I'm still a Muslim; my religion is still Islam. That's my personal belief. Just as Adam Clayton Powell is a Christian minister who heads the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York, but at the same time takes part in the political

[49] *To listen to a recording of the speech, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9BVEnEsn6Y.*
[50] *Louis E. Lomax (1922–70), African American journalist and civil rights activist. Lomax spoke earlier in the evening.*

struggles to try and bring about rights to the black people in this country; and Dr. Martin Luther King is a Christian minister down in Atlanta, Georgia, who heads another organization fighting for the civil rights of black people in this country; and Reverend Galamison, I guess you’ve heard of him, is another Christian minister in New York who has been deeply involved in the school boycotts to eliminate segregated education; well, I myself am a minister, not a Christian minister, but a Muslim minister; and I believe in action on all fronts by whatever means necessary.

Read the speech here:
http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1147.

Solve for X

DIANA SCHAUB

The final selection in this chapter looks back, from 2012, on Malcolm X's "The Ballot or the Bullet," and compares Malcolm's teaching and strategy to those of King. It is excerpted from the end of a review essay, "Solve for X," published in the Claremont Review of Books, *Winter 2012,*[51] *by Diana Schaub (b. 1959), political scientist at Loyola University Maryland, scholar of American and African American thought, and coeditor (with Amy and Leon Kass) of* What So Proudly We Hail: The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song. *Professor Schaub locates Malcolm X's alternatives "the ballot or the bullet" in the context of American political thought, and suggests, provocatively, that "elements of Malcolm's radicalism were in fact superior on their own terms" to King's civil disobedience, "because they held true to the nation's foundations and were in the long run less dangerous." What does Schuab mean by this claim? Schaub also suggests that Malcolm's formulation of the issue "allows us to ask the rarely raised question whether the struggle for civil rights could have achieved its end without resort to King's brand of 'civil' disobedience." How would you begin to answer this question? Finally, in the light of Schaub's discussion, whose approach to combating racial injustice in America—King's, Jackson's, or Malcolm X's—seems better to you, and better suited to the principles and practices of the American constitutional republic?*

[I]n his greatest speech, "The Ballot or the Bullet," Malcolm X began to reflect on the deepest questions of law and citizenship. Discussion of the relationship between ballots and bullets has a distinguished history in American political thought. Lincoln, for instance, when he argued against the constitutionality of secession, urged us to remember "that ballots are the rightful and peaceful successors of bullets; and that when ballots have fairly and constitutionally decided, there can be no successful appeal back to bullets; that there can be no successful appeal except to ballots themselves, at succeeding elections." Of course, in denouncing secession, Lincoln was not denying the existence of a right of revolution—there could be situations in which ballots have *not* fairly and constitutionally decided. Lincoln agreed with Jefferson that where "peaceable remedies are unprovided," the "sword of revolution" is always the ultimate resort. Frederick Douglass too had used the alliterative formula in a short 1859 editorial entitled "The Ballot and the Bullet." In arguing against [abolitionist William Lloyd] Garrison's no-voting theory, Douglass stated: "What we want is an anti-slavery Government, in harmony with our anti-slavery speech, one which will give effect to our words, and translate them into acts. For this, the ballot is needed, and if this will not be heard and heeded, then the bullet."

Malcolm X understood this Lockean logic. Legitimate government based on a free ballot binds the individual—binds him to work through the prescribed mechanisms of democratic consent; illegitimate government does not. The Lockean corrective to governmental abuse is revolution—or at least a potent threat that people will exercise

[51] *The full text is available at www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.1917/article_detail.asp.*

their right of revolution. As Malcolm put it: "It'll be Molotov cocktails this month, hand grenades next month, and something else next month. It'll be ballots, or it'll be bullets. It'll be liberty, or it will be death. The only difference about this kind of death [as compared to the turn-the-other-cheek deaths of those pledged to nonviolence]—it'll be reciprocal." Despite the incendiary quality of his language, Malcolm was careful to present this violence in the Lockean context of justifiable self-defense: "I don't mean go out and get violent; but at the same time you should never be nonviolent unless you run into some nonviolence."

Malcolm's targets were the segregationist authorities who were initiating the state of war and the followers of King who thought they could devise a nonviolent form of resistance or a civil form of disobedience. Malcolm was consistently critical of King's betwixt-and-between strategies. If the action is nonviolent it's not really resistance; remember, "ballot" is a kind of shorthand not just for the elective franchise but for all the tools of democratic citizenship: free speech, the rights of assembly and petition, and access to the courts (including the powerful tactic, used to the full by the NAACP, of testing the constitutionality of local and state laws). If, on the other hand, the action is truly disobedient (i.e., against the law), then it cannot be civil. In the final chapter of his *Second Treatise*, Locke pokes fun at the unintelligible notion that one could "strike with Reverence." Theoretically, Malcolm was on firmer ground than King. He stood with Locke, the American revolutionaries, and Abraham Lincoln—all of whom understood the choice to be either the ballot or the bullet, either the obligations of citizenship or the right of revolution. Psychologically too, Malcolm had a strong case: "If you don't take this kind of stand, your little children will grow up and look at you and think 'shame.'"

Fairness

People today often make the case that Malcolm was useful to the cause of racial justice because his extremism frightened white Americans into accepting reforms they otherwise wouldn't have—in other words, Malcolm played bad cop to Martin's good cop. But instead of blithely harnessing Malcolm to the onward rush of progressive history, perhaps we should consider the possibility that elements of Malcolm's radicalism were in fact superior, on their own terms, because they held true to the nation's foundations and were in the long run less dangerous. Malcolm X is not antinomian in the way that King is. As Lincoln argued in the Lyceum Address,[52] antinomianism (which acknowledges no authority other than the individual conscience) threatens not just law and order but law and justice. While I disagree fundamentally with Malcolm X's assertion that blacks in America were nothing more than "victims of Americanism," his classic formulation of the issue—"in 1964, it's the ballot or the bullet"—allows us to ask the rarely-raised question whether the struggle for civil rights could have achieved its end without resort to King's brand of supposedly "civil" disobedience. Would it have been better to focus more exclusively and directly on the ballot?

[52] *Read Abraham Lincoln's Speech to the Young Men's Lyceum at www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/the-perpetuation-of-our-political-institutions.*

This seems to be the route Malcolm was exploring. Despite an opening statement of the black man's essential alienation, "The Ballot or the Bullet" is by no means a straightforward call to arms. It's more a nuanced thinking through of the alternatives. Malcolm notes that since the white vote is always split, the black minority could hold outsized electoral influence. One aim of the speech is instruction in how to use the ballot wisely—after all, "a ballot is like a bullet." Malcolm is quick to acknowledge that greater political maturity may not be enough, if all politics in America is a white conspiracy—as race-based gerrymandering indicated. Nonetheless, he does not abandon the search for properly political solutions. Echoing Douglass, he notes that the parchment regime is on the side of fairness: "the Constitution itself has within it the machinery to expel any representative from a state where the voting rights of the people are violated." Although he mentions favorable decisions by the Supreme Court, he still doesn't trust Uncle Sam. By the end of the speech, he expands his search for friendly law to the World Court; but even this international strategy is grounded in law.

Malcolm's sense of not belonging in America began early. His rage ran deep. Born "Little," he struggled manfully against the belittlement that American race relations imposed on him. It's not clear where his greatly-questing spirit would have taken him had he lived beyond the age of 39. Whatever the twists and turns ahead, I suspect Malcolm would have preserved his ability to charm and surprise. At the Harvard Law School Forum in December 1964, Malcolm told a story of being on a plane, conversing pleasantly for 35 or 40 minutes with the white woman seated next to him. Seeing his monogramed briefcase, she asked him "what kind of last name could you have that begins with X?" His answer: "Malcolm." It took her some minutes to put that puzzle together but finally she blurted out, "You're not Malcolm X? . . . I just wouldn't believe that you were that man."

4

Civil Rights, Race, and the American Republic: Today and Tomorrow

Racial Discrimination and Affirmative Action

Brown v. Board of Education

EARL WARREN

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court, in the case of Brown v. Board of Education, *unanimously struck down as unconstitutional all state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students, holding that they violated the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection of the laws. Finding that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," the court overturned its own prior ruling in* Plessy v. Ferguson *(1896) that had upheld segregated schools on the principle of "separate but equal." Reaching this conclusion unanimously took much time and enormous effort by the newly appointed Chief Justice Earl Warren (1891–1974; Chief Justice 1953–69), who skillfully brought all the other justices to his point of view. Warren wrote and delivered the opinion of the court, from which we excerpt the following critical portions. (The following year, the court would issue its implementation decision in* Brown II, *ordering federal district courts to carry out school desegregation "with all deliberate speed.")*

What is Warren's argument that segregated schools are inherently *unequal? To what extent does the argument rest on empirical demonstrations of psychological and educational harm to Negro students? If no such harm could be demonstrated, would the argument against segregation by race collapse? Or does the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equality before the law rule out any discrimination based on race?*

These cases come to us from the States of Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware. They are premised on different facts and different local conditions, but a common legal question justifies their consideration together in this consolidated opinion.

In each of the cases, minors of the Negro race, through their legal representatives, seek the aid of the courts in obtaining admission to the public schools of their community on a nonsegregated basis. In each instance, they had been denied admission to schools attended by white children under laws requiring or permitting segregation according to race. This segregation was alleged to deprive the plaintiffs of the equal protection of the laws under the Fourteenth Amendment. In each of the cases other than the Delaware case, a three-judge federal district court denied relief to the plaintiffs on the so-called "separate but equal" doctrine announced by this Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537. Under that doctrine, equality of treatment is accorded when the races are provided substantially equal facilities, even though these facilities be separate. In the Delaware case, the Supreme Court of Delaware adhered to that doctrine, but ordered that the plaintiffs be admitted to the white schools because of their superiority to the Negro schools.

The plaintiffs contend that segregated public schools are not "equal" and cannot be made "equal," and that hence they are deprived of the equal protection of the laws. Because of the obvious importance of the question presented, the Court took jurisdiction.

Argument was heard in the 1952 Term, and re-argument was heard this Term on certain questions propounded by the Court.

Re-argument was largely devoted to the circumstances surrounding the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868. It covered exhaustively consideration of the Amendment in Congress, ratification by the states, then-existing practices in racial segregation, and the views of proponents and opponents of the Amendment. This discussion and our own investigation convince us that, although these sources cast some light, it is not enough to resolve the problem with which we are faced. At best, they are inconclusive. The most avid proponents of the post-War Amendments undoubtedly intended them to remove all legal distinctions among "all persons born or naturalized in the United States." Their opponents, just as certainly, were antagonistic to both the letter and the spirit of the Amendments and wished them to have the most limited effect. What others in Congress and the state legislatures had in mind cannot be determined with any degree of certainty.

An additional reason for the inconclusive nature of the Amendment's history with respect to segregated schools is the status of public education at that time. In the South, the movement toward free common schools, supported by general taxation, had not yet taken hold. Education of white children was largely in the hands of private groups. Education of Negroes was almost nonexistent, and practically all of the race were illiterate. In fact, any education of Negroes was forbidden by law in some states. Today, in contrast, many Negroes have achieved outstanding success in the arts and sciences, as well as in the business and professional world. It is true that public school education at the time of the Amendment had advanced further in the North, but the effect of the Amendment on Northern States was generally ignored in the congressional debates. Even in the North, the conditions of public education did not approximate those existing today. The curriculum was usually rudimentary; ungraded schools were common in rural areas; the school term was but three months a year in many states, and compulsory school attendance was virtually unknown. As a consequence, it is not surprising that there should be so little in the history of the Fourteenth Amendment relating to its intended effect on public education.

In the first cases in this Court construing the Fourteenth Amendment, decided shortly after its adoption, the Court interpreted it as proscribing all state-imposed discriminations against the Negro race. The doctrine of "separate but equal" did not make its appearance in this Court until 1896 in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson, supra*, involving not education but transportation. American courts have since labored with the doctrine for over half a century. In this Court, there have been six cases involving the "separate but equal" doctrine in the field of public education. In *Cumming v. County Board of Education*, 175 U.S. 528, and *Gong Lum v. Rice*, 275 U.S. 78, the validity of the doctrine itself was not challenged. In more recent cases, all on the graduate school level, inequality was found in that specific benefits enjoyed by white students were denied to Negro students of the same educational qualifications. *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada*, 305 U.S. 337; *Sipuel v. Oklahoma*, 332 U.S. 631; *Sweatt v. Painter*, 339 U.S. 629; *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*, 339 U.S. 637. In none of these cases was it necessary to reexamine the

doctrine to grant relief to the Negro plaintiff. And in *Sweatt v. Painter, supra*, the Court expressly reserved decision on the question whether *Plessy v. Ferguson* should be held inapplicable to public education.

In the instant cases, that question is directly presented. Here, unlike *Sweatt v. Painter*, there are findings below that the Negro and white schools involved have been equalized, or are being equalized, with respect to buildings, curricula, qualifications and salaries of teachers, and other "tangible" factors. Our decision, therefore, cannot turn on merely a comparison of these tangible factors in the Negro and white schools involved in each of the cases. We must look instead to the effect of segregation itself on public education.

In approaching this problem, we cannot turn the clock back to 1868, when the Amendment was adopted, or even to 1896, when *Plessy v. Ferguson* was written. We must consider public education in the light of its full development and its present place in American life throughout the Nation. Only in this way can it be determined if segregation in public schools deprives these plaintiffs of the equal protection of the laws.

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.

We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.

In *Sweatt v. Painter, supra,* in finding that a segregated law school for Negroes could not provide them equal educational opportunities, this Court relied in large part on "those qualities which are incapable of objective measurement but which make for greatness in a law school." In *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents, supra*, the Court, in requiring that a Negro admitted to a white graduate school be treated like all other students, again resorted to intangible considerations: " . . . his ability to study, to engage in discussions and exchange views with other students, and, in general, to learn his profession." Such considerations apply with added force to children in grade and high schools. To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone. The effect of this separation on their

educational opportunities was well stated by a finding in the Kansas case by a court which nevertheless felt compelled to rule against the Negro plaintiffs:

> Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law, for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to [retard] the educational and mental development of negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racial[ly] integrated school system.

Whatever may have been the extent of psychological knowledge at the time of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, this finding is amply supported by modern authority. Any language in *Plessy v. Ferguson* contrary to this finding is rejected.

We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. This disposition makes unnecessary any discussion whether such segregation also violates the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Because these are class actions, because of the wide applicability of this decision, and because of the great variety of local conditions, the formulation of decrees in these cases presents problems of considerable complexity. On re-argument, the consideration of appropriate relief was necessarily subordinated to the primary question—the constitutionality of segregation in public education. We have now announced that such segregation is a denial of the equal protection of the laws. In order that we may have the full assistance of the parties in formulating decrees, the cases will be restored to the docket, and the parties are requested to present further argument on Questions 4 and 5 previously propounded by the Court for the re-argument this Term. The Attorney General of the United States is again invited to participate. The Attorneys General of the states requiring or permitting segregation in public education will also be permitted to appear as *amici curiae* upon request to do so by September 15, 1954, and submission of briefs by October 1, 1954.

It is so ordered.

Parents Involved in Community Schools
v.
Seattle School District No. 1

JOHN G. ROBERTS

In the almost 60 years since Brown, *the Supreme Court has several times heard a diverse array of cases about the use of race as a factor in admissions to public schools and universities. Some involve preferential treatment for blacks and other minorities (so-called affirmative action), others involve efforts to produce desired racial and ethnic "diversity." These complicated cases, which unlike* Brown *have usually been decided by a divided court, have not finally settled when race may, and when it may not, be taken into account in admissions decisions, though one touchstone for these cases is whether it can be shown that there is a compelling state interest in allowing race to play a decisive role. In the present case,* Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1, *decided in 2007 by a 5–4 vote, the court struck down practices that assigned students to schools on the basis of race and denied that achieving racial balance in a school is a "compelling state interest." Chief Justice John Roberts (b. 1955; Chief Justice since 2005) wrote the opinion of the court, here excerpted.*

What are Roberts' arguments against racially based student assignment in this case? Is use of race in school placement inherently discriminatory, quite apart from any harm done? Is the state's showing favor to blacks as suspect under the Fourteenth Amendment—and as racially discriminatory—as was the state's showing favor to whites? Or does a different understanding of what constitutes a violation of the "equal protection of the laws" apply in cases of affirmative action and Brown's *overthrow of racially segregated school systems? If so, what is it? What is your response to Roberts' concluding remark: "The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race"?*

The school districts in these cases voluntarily adopted student assignment plans that rely upon race to determine which public schools certain children may attend. The Seattle school district classifies children as white or nonwhite; the Jefferson County school district as black or "other." In Seattle, this racial classification is used to allocate slots in oversubscribed high schools. In Jefferson County, it is used to make certain elementary school assignments and to rule on transfer requests. In each case, the school district relies upon an individual student's race in assigning that student to a particular school, so that the racial balance at the school falls within a predetermined range based on the racial composition of the school district as a whole. Parents of students denied assignment to particular schools under these plans solely because of their race brought suit, contending that allocating children to different public schools on the basis of race violated the Fourteenth Amendment guarantee of equal protection. The Courts of Appeals below upheld the plans. We granted certiorari, and now reverse. . . .

If the need for the racial classifications embraced by the school districts is unclear, even on the districts' own terms, the costs are undeniable. "[D]istinctions between citizens solely because of their ancestry are by their very nature odious to a free people whose institutions are founded upon the doctrine of equality." *Adarand*, 515 U.S., at 214. Government action dividing us by race is inherently suspect because such classifications promote "notions of racial inferiority and lead to a politics of racial hostility," *Croson*, *supra*, at 493, "reinforce the belief, held by too many for too much of our history, that individuals should be judged by the color of their skin," *Shaw v. Reno*, 509 U.S. 630, 657 (1993), and "endorse race-based reasoning and the conception of a Nation divided into racial blocs, thus contributing to an escalation of racial hostility and conflict." *Metro Broadcasting*, 497 U.S., at 603 (O'Connor, J., dissenting). As the Court explained in *Rice v. Cayetano*, 528 U.S. 495, 517 (2000) , "[o]ne of the principal reasons race is treated as a forbidden classification is that it demeans the dignity and worth of a person to be judged by ancestry instead of by his or her own merit and essential qualities."

All this is true enough in the contexts in which these statements were made—government contracting, voting districts, allocation of broadcast licenses, and electing state officers—but when it comes to using race to assign children to schools, history will be heard. In *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), we held that segregation deprived black children of equal educational opportunities regardless of whether school facilities and other tangible factors were equal, because government classification and separation on grounds of race themselves denoted inferiority. It was not the inequality of the facilities but the fact of legally separating children on the basis of race on which the Court relied to find a constitutional violation in 1954. ("'The impact [of segregation] is greater when it has the sanction of the law'"). The next Term, we accordingly stated that "full compliance" with *Brown I* required school districts "to achieve a system of determining admission to the public schools *on a nonracial basis*." *Brown II*, 349 U.S. at 300–301 (emphasis added).

The parties and their *amici* debate which side is more faithful to the heritage of *Brown*, but the position of the plaintiffs in *Brown* was spelled out in their brief and could not have been clearer: "[T]he Fourteenth Amendment prevents states from according differential treatment to American children on the basis of their color or race." What do the racial classifications at issue here do, if not accord differential treatment on the basis of race? As counsel who appeared before this Court for the plaintiffs in *Brown* put it: "We have one fundamental contention which we will seek to develop in the course of this argument, and that contention is that no State has any authority under the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to use race as a factor in affording educational opportunities among its citizens." There is no ambiguity in that statement. And it was that position that prevailed in this Court, which emphasized in its remedial opinion that what was "[a]t stake is the personal interest of the plaintiffs in admission to public schools as soon as practicable on a *nondiscriminatory basis*," and what was required was "determining admission to the public schools *on a nonracial basis*" (emphasis added). What do the racial classifications do in these cases, if not determine admission to a public school on a racial basis?

Before *Brown*, schoolchildren were told where they could and could not go to school based on the color of their skin. The school districts in these cases have not carried the heavy burden of demonstrating that we should allow this once again—even for very different reasons. For schools that never segregated on the basis of race, such as Seattle, or that have removed the vestiges of past segregation, such as Jefferson County, the way "to achieve a system of determining admission to the public schools on a nonracial basis," is to stop assigning students on a racial basis. The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.

The judgments of the Courts of Appeals for the Sixth and Ninth Circuits are reversed, and the cases are remanded for further proceedings.

It is so ordered.

Affirmative Action
from *The Content of Our Character*

SHELBY STEELE

One of the most vexing questions about American race relations concerns the wisdom and fairness of our programs of affirmative action, practices that, in the name of justice and fairness, give one form or another of preferential treatment to blacks (and other victims of prior discrimination), in order to help them overcome the handicaps incurred as a result of prior injustice and deprivation. As the last selection indicates, the legal debates turn on whether such racial preferences fall afoul of the Equal Protection Clause (and also the Due Process Clause) of the Fourteenth Amendment. But there are also social and psychological arguments about the benefits and harms of affirmative action, both to the broader society and to the presumptive beneficiaries of the practice. The social and personal arguments in favor of affirmative action are well known: to diminish racial tensions by promoting greater racial equality; to provide disadvantaged persons a leg up in their pursuit of a worthy life. But the possible costs of the practice are less openly discussed. That is the subject of this selection, "Affirmative Action: The Price of Preference," by prize-winning author, columnist, scholar and filmmaker, Shelby Steele (b. 1946), taken from his 1990 bestselling book, The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America.

Steele grants the good intentions of affirmative action but is worried about its effects. Is he right in doing so? Why does Steele distinguish between racial representation and racial development? List the various reasons that Steele gives for thinking that blacks may lose more from affirmative action than they gain? Which of these, if any, do you find compelling, and why? What is the effect of affirmative action on racialist attitudes and discrimination? What form of affirmative action does Steele believe will truly contribute to black empowerment and progress?

In a few short years, when my two children will be applying to college, the affirmative action policies by which most universities offer black students some form of preferential treatment will present me with a dilemma. I am a middle-class black, a college professor, far from wealthy, but also well-removed from the kind of deprivation that would qualify my children for the label "disadvantaged." Both of them have endured racial insensitivity from whites. They have been called names, have suffered slights, and have experienced firsthand the peculiar malevolence that racism brings out in people. Yet, they have never experienced racial discrimination, have never been stopped by their race on any path that they have chosen to follow. Still, their society now tells them that if they will only designate themselves as black on their college applications, they will likely do better in the college lottery than if they conceal this fact. I think there is something of a Faustian bargain in this.

Of course, many blacks and a considerable number of whites would say that I was sanctimoniously making affirmative action into a test of character. They would say that

this small preference is the meagerest recompense for centuries of unrelieved oppression. And to these arguments other very obvious facts must be added. In America, many marginally competent or flatly incompetent whites are hired every day—some because their white skin suits the conscious or unconscious racial preference of their employers. The white children of alumni are often grandfathered into elite universities in what can only be seen as a residual benefit of historic white privilege. Worse, white incompetence is always an individual matter, but for blacks it is often confirmation of ugly stereotypes. Given that unfairness cuts both ways, doesn't it only balance the scales of history, doesn't this repay, in a small way, the systematic denial under which my children's grandfather lived out his days?

In theory, affirmative action certainly has all the moral symmetry that fairness requires—the injustice of historical and even contemporary white advantage is offset with black advantage; preference replaces prejudice, inclusion answers exclusion. It is reformist and corrective, even repentant and redemptive. And I would never sneer at these good intentions. Born in the late forties in Chicago, I started my education (a charitable term in this case) in a segregated school and suffered all the indignities that come to blacks in a segregated society. My father, born in the South, made it only to the third grade before the white man's fields took permanent priority over his formal education. And though he educated himself into an advanced reader with an almost professorial authority, he could only drive a truck for a living, and never earned more than $90 a week in his entire life. So yes, it is crucial to my sense of citizenship, to my ability to identify with the spirit and the interests of America, to know that this country, however imperfectly, recognizes its past sins and wishes to correct them.

Yet good intentions can blind us to the effects they generate when implemented. In our society affirmative action is, among other things, a testament to white goodwill and to black power, and in the midst of these heavy investments its effects can be hard to see. But after twenty years of implementation I think that affirmative action has shown itself to be more bad than good and that blacks—whom I will focus on in this essay—now stand to lose more from it than they gain.

In talking with affirmative action administrators and with blacks and whites in general, I found that supporters of affirmative action focus on its good intentions while detractors emphasize its negative effects. Proponents talk about "diversity" and "pluralism"; opponents speak of "reverse discrimination," the unfairness of quotas and set-asides. It was virtually impossible to find people outside either camp. The closest I came was a white male manager at a large computer company who said, "I think it amounts to reverse discrimination, but I'll put up with a little of that for a little more diversity." I'll live with a little of the effect to gain a little of the intention, he seemed to be saying. But this only makes him a halfhearted supporter of affirmative action. I think many people who don't really like affirmative action support it to one degree or another anyway.

I believe they do this because of what happened to white and black Americans in the crucible of the sixties, when whites were confronted with their racial guilt and blacks

tasted their first real power. In that stormy time white absolution and black power coalesced into virtual mandates for society. Affirmative action became a meeting ground for those mandates in the law, and in the late sixties and early seventies it underwent a remarkable escalation of its mission from simple anti-discrimination enforcement to social engineering by means of quotas, goals, timetables, set-asides and other forms of preferential treatment.

Legally, this was achieved through a series of executive orders and EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] guidelines that allowed racial imbalances in the workplace to stand as proof of racial discrimination. Once it could be assumed that discrimination explained racial imbalances, it became easy to justify group remedies to presumed discrimination rather than the normal case-by-case redress for proven discrimination. Preferential treatment through quotas, goals, and so on is designed to correct imbalances based on the assumption that they always indicate discrimination. This expansion of what constitutes discrimination allowed affirmative action to escalate into the business of social engineering in the name of anti-discrimination, to push society toward statistically proportionate racial representation, without any obligation of proving actual discrimination.

What accounted for this shift, I believe, was the white mandate to achieve a new racial innocence and the black mandate to gain power. Even though blacks had made great advances during the sixties without quotas, these mandates, which came to a head in the very late sixties, could no longer be satisfied by anything less than racial preferences. I don't think these mandates in themselves were wrong, because whites clearly needed to do better by blacks and blacks needed more real power in society. But, as they came together in affirmative action, their effect was to distort our understanding of racial discrimination in a way that allowed us to offer the remediation of preference on the basis of mere color rather than actual injury. By making black the color of preference, these mandates have reburdened society with the very marriage of color and preference (in reverse) that we set out to eradicate. The old sin is reaffirmed in a new guise.

But the essential problems with this form of affirmative action is the way it leaps over the hard business of developing a formerly oppressed people to the point where they can achieve proportionate representation on their own (given equal opportunity) and goes straight for the proportionate representation, This may satisfy some whites of their innocence and some blacks of their power, but it does very little to truly uplift blacks.

A white female affirmative action officer at an Ivy League university told me what many supporters of affirmative action now say: "We're after diversity. We ideally want a student body where racial and ethnic groups are represented according to their proportion in society." When affirmative action escalated into social engineering, diversity became a golden word. It grants whites an egalitarian fairness (innocence) and blacks an entitlement to proportionate representation (power). *Diversity* is a term that applies democratic principles to races and cultures rather than to citizens, despite the fact that there is nothing to indicate that real diversity is the same thing as proportionate representation. Too often the result of this, on campuses (for example) has been a

democracy of colors rather than of people, an artificial diversity that gives the appearance of an educational parity between black and white students that has not yet been achieved in reality. Here again, racial preferences allow society to leapfrog over the difficult problem of developing blacks to parity with whites and into a cosmetic diversity that covers the blemish of disparity—a full six years after admission, only 26 percent of blacks graduate from college.

Racial representation is not the same thing as racial development, yet affirmative action fosters a confusion of these very different needs. Representation can be manufactured; development is always hard-earned. However, it is the music of innocence and power that we hear in affirmative action that causes us to cling to it and to its distracting emphasis on representation. The fact is that after twenty years of racial preferences the gap between white and black median income is greater than it was in the seventies. None of this is to say that blacks don't need policies that insure our right to equal opportunity, but what we need more of is the development that will let us take advantage of society's efforts to include us.

I think one of the most troubling effects of racial preferences for blacks is a kind of demoralization, or put another way, an enlargement of self-doubt. Under affirmative action, the quality that earns us preferential treatment is an implied inferiority. However this inferiority is explained—and it is easily enough explained by the myriad deprivations that grew out of our oppression—it is still inferiority. There are explanations, and then there is the fact. And the fact must be borne by the individual as a condition apart from the explanation, apart even from the fact that others like himself also bear this condition. In integrated situations in which blacks must compete with whites who may be better prepared, these explanations may quickly wear thin and expose the individual to racial as well as personal self-doubt.

All of this is compounded by the cultural myth of black inferiority that blacks have always lived with. What this means in practical terms is that when blacks deliver themselves into integrated situations, they encounter a nasty little reflex in whites, a mindless, atavistic reflex that responds to the color black with alarm. Attributions may follow this alarm if the white cares to indulge them, and if they do, they will most likely be negative—one such attribution is intellectual ineptness. I think this reflex and the attributions that may follow it embarrass most whites today, therefore, it is usually quickly repressed. Nevertheless, on an equally atavistic level, the black will be aware of the reflex his color triggers and will feel a stab of horror at seeing himself reflected in this way. He, too, will do a quick repression, but a lifetime of such stabbings is what constitutes his inner realm of racial doubt.

The effects of this may be a subject for another essay. The point here is that the implication of inferiority that racial preferences engender in both the white and black mind expands rather than contracts this doubt. Even when the black sees no implication of inferiority in racial preferences, he knows that whites do, so that—consciously or unconsciously—the result is virtually the same. The effect of preferential treatment—the lowering of normal standards to increase black representation—puts blacks at war with

an expanded realm of debilitating doubt, so that the doubt itself becomes an unrecognized preoccupation that undermines their ability to perform, especially in integrated situations. On largely white campuses, blacks are five times more likely to drop out than whites. Preferential treatment, no matter how it is justified in the light of day, subjects blacks to a midnight of self-doubt, and so often transforms their advantage into a revolving door.

Another liability of affirmative action comes from the fact that it indirectly encourages blacks to exploit their own past victimization as a source of power and privilege. Victimization, like implied inferiority, is what justifies preference, so that to receive the benefits of preferential treatment one must, to some extent, become invested in the view of one's self as a victim. In this way, affirmative action nurtures a victim-focused identity in blacks. The obvious irony here is that we have become inadvertently invested in the very condition we are trying to overcome. Racial preferences send us the message that there is more power in our past suffering than in our present achievements—none of which could bring us a *preference* over others.

When power itself grows out of suffering, blacks are encouraged to expand the boundaries of what qualifies as racial oppression, a situation that can lead us to paint our victimization in vivid colors, even as we receive the benefits of preference. The same corporations and institutions that give us preference are also seen as our oppressors. At Stanford University, minority students—some of whom enjoy as much as $15,000 a year in financial aid—recently took over the president's office demanding, among other things, more financial aid. The power to be found in victimization, like any power, is intoxicating and can lend itself to the creation of a new class of super-victims who can feel the pea of victimization under twenty mattresses. Preferential treatment rewards us for being underdogs rather than for moving beyond that status—a misplacement of incentives that, along with its deepening of our doubt, is more a yoke than a spur.

But, I think, one of the worst prices that blacks pay for preference has to do with an illusion. I saw this illusion at work recently in the mother of a middle-class black student who was going off to his first semester of college. "They owe us this, so don't think for a minute that you don't belong there." This is the logic by which many blacks, and some whites, justify affirmative action—it is something "owed," a form of reparation. But this logic overlooks a much harder and less digestible reality, that it is impossible to repay blacks living today for the historic suffering of the race. If all blacks were given a million dollars tomorrow it would not amount to a dime on the dollar for three centuries of oppression, nor would it dissolve the residues of that oppression that we still carry today. The concept of historic reparation grows out of man's need to impose on the world a degree of justice that simply does not exist. Suffering can be endured and overcome, it cannot be repaid. Blacks cannot be repaid for the injustice done to the race, but we can be corrupted by society's guilty gestures of repayment.

Affirmative action is such a gesture. It tells us that racial preferences can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The corruption here is in the hidden incentive *not* to do what we believe preferences will do. This is an incentive to be reliant on others just as we are struggling for self-reliance. And it keeps alive the illusion that we can find some

deliverance in repayment. The hardest thing for any sufferer to accept is that his suffering excuses him from very little and never has enough currency to restore him. To think otherwise is to prolong the suffering.

Several blacks I spoke with said they were still in favor of affirmative action because of the "subtle" discrimination blacks were subject to once on the job. One photojournalist said, "They have ways of ignoring you." A black female television producer said, "You can't file a lawsuit when your boss doesn't invite you to the insider meetings without ruining your career. So we still need affirmative action." Others mentioned the infamous "glass ceiling" through which blacks can see the top positions of authority but never reach them. But I don't think racial preferences are a protection against this subtle discrimination; I think they contribute to it.

In any workplace, racial preferences will always create two-tiered populations composed of preferreds and unpreferreds. This division makes automatic a perception of enhanced competence for the unpreferreds and of questionable competence for the preferreds—the former earned his way, even though others were given preference, while the latter made it by color as much as by preference. Racial preferences implicitly mark whites with an exaggerated superiority just as they mark blacks with an exaggerated inferiority. They not only reinforce America's oldest racial myth but, for blacks, they have the effect of stigmatizing the already stigmatized.

I think that much of the "subtle" discrimination that blacks talk about is often (not always) discrimination against the stigma of questionable competence that affirmative action delivers to blacks. In this sense, preferences scapegoat the very people they seek to help. And it may be that at a certain level employers impose a glass ceiling, but this may not be against the race so much as against the race's reputation for having advanced by color as much as by competence. Affirmative action makes a glass ceiling virtually necessary as a protection against the corruptions of preferential treatment. This ceiling is the point at which corporations shift the emphasis from color to competency and stop playing the affirmative action game. Here preference backfires for blacks and becomes a taint that holds them back. Of course, one could argue that this taint, which is, after all, in the minds of whites, becomes nothing more than an excuse to discriminate against blacks. And certainly the result is the same in either case—blacks don't get past the glass ceiling. But this argument does not get around the fact that racial preferences now taint this color with a new theme of suspicion that makes blacks even more vulnerable to discrimination. In this crucial yet gray area of perceived competence, preferences make whites look better than they are and blacks worse, while doing nothing whatever to stop the very real discrimination that blacks may encounter. I don't wish to justify the glass ceiling here, but only to suggest the very subtle ways that affirmative action revives rather than extinguishes the old rationalizations for racial discrimination.

In education, a revolving door; in employment, a glass ceiling.

I believe affirmative action is problematic in our society because it tries to function like a social program. Rather than ask it to ensure equal opportunity we have demanded

that it create parity between the races. But preferential treatment does not teach skills, or educate, or instill motivation. It only passes out entitlement by color, a situation that in my profession has created an unrealistically high demand for black professors. The social engineer's assumption is that this high demand will inspire more blacks to earn Ph.D.'s and join the profession. In fact, the number of blacks earning Ph.D.'s has declined in recent years. A Ph.D. must be developed from preschool on. He requires family and community support. He must acquire an entire system of values that enables him to work hard while delaying gratification. There are social programs, I believe, that can (and should) help blacks *develop* in all these areas, but entitlement by color is not a social program; it is a dubious reward for being black.

It now seems clear that the Supreme Court, in a series of recent decisions, is moving away from racial preferences. It has disallowed preferences except in instances of "identified discrimination," eroded the precedent that statistical racial imbalances are *prima facie* evidence of discrimination, and, in effect, granted white males the right to challenge consent degrees that use preference to achieve racial balances in the workplace. One civil rights leader said, "Night has fallen on civil rights." But I am not so sure. The effect of these decisions is to protect the constitutional rights of everyone, rather than to take rights away from blacks. What they do take away from blacks is the special entitlement to more rights than others that preferences must always grant. Night has fallen on racial preferences, not on the fundamental rights of black Americans. The reason for this shift, I believe, is that the white mandate for absolution from past racial sins has weakened considerably in the eighties. Whites are now less willing to endure unfairness to themselves in order to grant special entitlements to blacks, even when those entitlements are justified in the name of past suffering. Yet the black mandate for more power in society has remained unchanged. And I think part of the anxiety many blacks feel over these decisions has to do with the loss of black power that they may signal. We had won a certain specialness and now we are losing it.

But the power we've lost by these decisions is really only the power that grows out of our victimization—the power to claim special entitlements under the law because of past oppression. This is not a very substantial or reliable power, and it is important that we know this so we can focus more exclusively on the kind of development that will bring enduring power. There is talk now that Congress may pass new legislation to compensate for these new limits on affirmative action. If this happens, I hope the focus will be on development and anti-discrimination, rather than entitlement, on achieving racial parity rather than jerry-building racial diversity.

I would also like to see affirmative action go back to its original purpose of enforcing equal opportunity—a purpose that in itself disallows racial preferences. We cannot be sure that the discriminatory impulse in America has yet been ashamed into extinction, and I believe affirmative action can make its greatest contribution by providing a rigorous vigilance in this area. I can guard constitutional rather than racial rights, and help institutions evolve standards of merit and selection that are appropriate to the institution's needs yet as free of racial bias as possible (again, with the understanding that racial imbalances are not always an indication of racial bias). One of the more important things

affirmative action can do is to define exactly what racial discrimination is and how it might manifest itself within a specific institution. The impulse to discriminate *is* subtle and cannot be ferretted out unless its guises are made clear to people. Along with this there should be monitoring of institutions and heavy sanctions brought to bear when actual discrimination is found. This is the sort of affirmative action that America owes to blacks and itself. It goes after the evil of discrimination itself, while preferences only sidestep the evil and grant entitlement to its *presumed* victims.

But if not preferences, then what? I think we need social policies that are committed to two goals: the educational and economic development of disadvantaged people, regardless of race, and the eradication from our society—through close monitoring and severe sanctions—of racial, ethnic, or gender discrimination. Preferences will not get us to either of these goals, because they tend to benefit those who are not disadvantaged—middle-class white women and middle-class blacks—and attack one form of discrimination with another. Preferences are inexpensive and carry the glamour of good intentions—change the numbers and the good deed is done. To be against them is to be unkind. But I think the unkindest cut is to bestow on children like my own an undeserved advantage while neglecting the development of those disadvantaged children on the East Side of my city who will most likely never be in a position to benefit from a preference. Give my children fairness; give disadvantaged children a better shot at development—better elementary and secondary schools, job training, safer neighborhoods, better financial assistance for college, and so on. Fewer blacks go to college today than ten years ago; more black males of college age are in prison or under the control of the criminal justice system than in college. This despite racial preferences.

The mandates of black power and white absolution out of which preferences emerged were not wrong in themselves. What was wrong was that both races focused more on the goals of those mandates than on the means to the goals. Blacks can have no real power without taking responsibility for their own educational and economic development. Whites can have no racial innocence without earning it by eradicating discrimination and helping the disadvantaged to develop. Because we ignored the means, the goals have not been reached, and the real work remains to be done.

The Pursuit of Equality

Harrison Bergeron

KURT VONNEGUT JR.

Central to the American creed is the principle of equality, beginning with the notion that all human beings possess certain fundamental rights and equal standing before the law. Our concern for equality has expanded over the past half century to focus also on inequalities in opportunities, wealth, achievement, and social condition. What good is an equal right to pursue happiness if one lacks the social means or native gifts to exercise it successfully? In this satirical story (1961), set in a future time in which "everybody was finally equal . . . every which way," Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (1922–2007) challenges our devotion to equality and invites us to consider the costs of pursuing it too zealously. Although the story is not explicitly about racial equality, the questions it provokes about the kind of equality we should want are relevant also to campaigns to eliminate inequalities among racial groups.

Does the society portrayed here represent a fulfillment of the ideal of equality in the Declaration of Independence, or rather a perversion of the principle? Does opposing invidious distinctions, envy, and feelings of inferiority require reducing everyone to the lowest common denominator, and is this the true path to "social justice"? Would homogeneity attained by artificially raising up the low, producing a nation of Harrisons rather than a nation of Hazels—a prospect offered by biotechnological "enhancement"—be more reasonable or any more attractive? What might this story have to say to the aspirations to achieve racial equality in performance and success?

The year was 2081, and everybody was finally equal. They weren't only equal before God and the law. They were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution, and to the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General.

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Some things about living still weren't quite right, though. April, for instance, still drove people crazy by not being springtime. And it was in that month that the H-G men took George and Hazel Bergeron's fourteen-year-old son, Harrison, away.

It was tragic, all right, but George and Hazel couldn't think about it very hard. Hazel had a perfectly average intelligence, which meant she couldn't think about anything

except in short bursts. And George, while his intelligence was way above normal, had a little mental handicap radio in his ear. He was required by law to wear it at all times. It was tuned to a government transmitter. Every twenty seconds or so, the transmitter would send out some sharp noise to keep people like George from taking unfair advantage of their brains.

George and Hazel were watching television. There were tears on Hazel's cheeks, but she'd forgotten for the moment what they were about.

On the television screen were ballerinas.

A buzzer sounded in George's head. His thoughts fled in panic, like bandits from a burglar alarm.

"That was a real pretty dance, that dance they just did," said Hazel.

"Huh?" said George.

"That dance—it was nice," said Hazel.

"Yup," said George. He tried to think a little about the ballerinas. They weren't really very good—no better than anybody else would have been, anyway. They were burdened with sash-weights and bags of birdshot, and their faces were masked, so that no one, seeing a free and graceful gesture or a pretty face, would feel like something the cat drug in. George was toying with the vague notion that maybe dancers shouldn't be handicapped. But he didn't get very far with it before another noise in his ear radio scattered his thoughts.

George winced. So did two out of the eight ballerinas.

Hazel saw him wince. Having no mental handicap herself, she had to ask George what the latest sound had been.

"Sounded like somebody hitting a milk bottle with a ball peen hammer," said George.

"I'd think it would be real interesting, hearing all the different sounds," said Hazel, a little envious. "All the things they think up."

"Um," said George.

"Only, if I was Handicapper General, you know what I would do?" said Hazel. Hazel, as a matter of fact, bore a strong resemblance to the Handicapper General, a woman named Diana Moon Glampers. "If I was Diana Moon Glampers," said Hazel, "I'd have chimes on Sunday—just chimes. Kind of in honor of religion."

“I could think, if it was just chimes,” said George.

“Well—maybe make ’em real loud,” said Hazel. “I think I’d make a good Handicapper General.”

“Good as anybody else,” said George.

“Who knows better’n I do what normal is?” said Hazel.

“Right,” said George. He began to think glimmeringly about his abnormal son who was now in jail, about Harrison, but a twenty-one-gun salute in his head stopped that.

“Boy!” said Hazel, “that was a doozy, wasn’t it?”

It was such a doozy that George was white and trembling, and tears stood on the rims of his red eyes. Two of the eight ballerinas had collapsed to the studio floor, were holding their temples.

“All of a sudden you look so tired,” said Hazel. “Why don’t you stretch out on the sofa, so’s you can rest your handicap bag on the pillows, honeybunch.” She was referring to the forty-seven pounds of birdshot in a canvas bag, which was padlocked around George’s neck. “Go on and rest the bag for a little while,” she said. “I don’t care if you’re not equal to me for a while.”

George weighed the bag with his hands. “I don’t mind it,” he said. “I don’t notice it any more. It’s just a part of me.”

“You been so tired lately—kind of wore out,” said Hazel. “If there was just some way we could make a little hole in the bottom of the bag, and just take out a few of them lead balls. Just a few.”

“Two years in prison and two thousand dollars fine for every ball I took out,” said George. “I don’t call that a bargain.”

“If you could just take a few out when you came home from work,” said Hazel. “I mean—you don’t compete with anybody around here. You just set around.”

“If I tried to get away with it,” said George, “then other people’d get away with it—and pretty soon we’d be right back to the dark ages again, with everybody competing against everybody else. You wouldn’t like that, would you?”

“I’d hate it,” said Hazel.

“There you are,” said George. “The minute people start cheating on laws, what do you think happens to society?”

If Hazel hadn't been able to come up with an answer to this question, George couldn't have supplied one. A siren was going off in his head.

"Reckon it'd fall all apart," said Hazel.

"What would?" said George blankly.

"Society," said Hazel uncertainly. "Wasn't that what you just said?"

"Who knows?" said George.

The television program was suddenly interrupted for a news bulletin. It wasn't clear at first as to what the bulletin was about, since the announcer, like all announcers, had a serious speech impediment. For about half a minute, and in a state of high excitement, the announcer tried to say, "Ladies and gentlemen—"

He finally gave up, handed the bulletin to a ballerina to read.

"That's all right—" Hazel said of the announcer, "he tried. That's the big thing. He tried to do the best he could with what God gave him. He should get a nice raise for trying so hard."

"Ladies and gentlemen—" said the ballerina, reading the bulletin. She must have been extraordinarily beautiful, because the mask she wore was hideous. And it was easy to see that she was the strongest and most graceful of all the dancers, for her handicap bags were as big as those worn by two-hundred-pound men.

And she had to apologize at once for her voice, which was a very unfair voice for a woman to use. Her voice was a warm, luminous, timeless melody. "Excuse me—" she said, and she began again, making her voice absolutely uncompetitive.

"Harrison Bergeron, age fourteen," she said in a grackle squawk, "has just escaped from jail, where he was held on suspicion of plotting to overthrow the government. He is a genius and an athlete, is under-handicapped, and should be regarded as extremely dangerous."

A police photograph of Harrison Bergeron was flashed on the screen— upside down, then sideways, upside down again, then right side up. The picture showed the full length of Harrison against a background calibrated in feet and inches. He was exactly seven feet tall.

The rest of Harrison's appearance was Halloween and hardware. Nobody had ever borne heavier handicaps. He had outgrown hindrances faster than the H-G men could think them up. Instead of a little ear radio for a mental handicap, he wore a tremendous pair of earphones, and spectacles with thick wavy lenses. The spectacles were intended to make him not only half blind, but to give him whanging headaches besides.

Scrap metal was hung all over him. Ordinarily, there was a certain symmetry, a military neatness to the handicaps issued to strong people, but Harrison looked like a walking junkyard. In the race of life, Harrison carried three hundred pounds.

And to offset his good looks, the H-G men required that he wear at all times a red rubber ball for a nose, keep his eyebrows shaved off, and cover his even white teeth with black caps at snaggle-tooth random.

“If you see this boy,” said the ballerina, “do not—I repeat, do not—try to reason with him.”

There was the shriek of a door being torn from its hinges.

Screams and barking cries of consternation came from the television set. The photograph of Harrison Bergeron on the screen jumped again and again, as though dancing to the tune of an earthquake.

George Bergeron correctly identified the earthquake, and well he might have—for many was the time his own home had danced to the same crashing tune. “My God—” said George, “that must be Harrison!”

The realization was blasted from his mind instantly by the sound of an automobile collision in his head.

When George could open his eyes again, the photograph of Harrison was gone. A living, breathing Harrison filled the screen.

Clanking, clownish, and huge, Harrison stood in the center of the studio. The knob of the uprooted studio door was still in his hand. Ballerinas, technicians, musicians, and announcers cowered on their knees before him, expecting to die.

“I am the Emperor!” cried Harrison. “Do you hear? I am the Emperor! Everybody must do what I say at once!” He stamped his foot and the studio shook.

“Even as I stand here—” he bellowed, “crippled, hobbled, sickened—I am a greater ruler than any man who ever lived! Now watch me become what I can become!”

Harrison tore the straps of his handicap harness like wet tissue paper, tore straps guaranteed to support five thousand pounds.

Harrison’s scrap-iron handicaps crashed to the floor.

Harrison thrust his thumbs under the bar of the padlock that secured his head harness. The bar snapped like celery. Harrison smashed his headphones and spectacles against the wall.

He flung away his rubber-ball nose, revealed a man that would have awed Thor, the god of thunder.

"I shall now select my Empress!" he said, looking down on the cowering people. "Let the first woman who dares rise to her feet claim her mate and her throne!"

A moment passed, and then a ballerina arose, swaying like a willow.

Harrison plucked the mental handicap from her ear, snapped off her physical handicaps with marvelous delicacy. Last of all, he removed her mask.

She was blindingly beautiful. "Now—" said Harrison, taking her hand, "shall we show the people the meaning of the word dance? Music!" he commanded.

The musicians scrambled back into their chairs, and Harrison stripped them of their handicaps, too. "Play your best," he told them, "and I'll make you barons and dukes and earls."

The music began. It was normal at first—cheap, silly, false. But Harrison snatched two musicians from their chairs, waved them like batons as he sang the music as he wanted it played. He slammed them back into their chairs.

The music began again and was much improved.

Harrison and his Empress merely listened to the music for a while—listened gravely, as though synchronizing their heartbeats with it.

They shifted their weights to their toes.

Harrison placed his big hands on the girl's tiny waist, letting her sense the weightlessness that would soon be hers.

And then, in an explosion of joy and grace, into the air they sprang!

Not only were the laws of the land abandoned, but the law of gravity and the laws of motion as well.

They reeled, whirled, swiveled, flounced, capered, gamboled, and spun.

They leaped like deer on the moon.

The studio ceiling was thirty feet high, but each leap brought the dancers nearer to it.

It became their obvious intention to kiss the ceiling.

They kissed it.

And then, neutralizing gravity with love and pure will, they remained suspended in air inches below the ceiling, and they kissed each other for a long, long time.

It was then that Diana Moon Glampers, the Handicapper General, came into the studio with a double-barreled ten-gauge shotgun. She fired twice, and the Emperor and the Empress were dead before they hit the floor.

Diana Moon Glampers loaded the gun again. She aimed it at the musicians and told them they had ten seconds to get their handicaps back on.

It was then that the Bergerons’ television tube burned out.

Hazel turned to comment about the blackout to George.

But George had gone out into the kitchen for a can of beer.

George came back in with the beer, paused while a handicap signal shook him up. And then he sat down again. “You been crying?” he said to Hazel.

“Yup,” she said.

“What about?” he said.

“I forget,” she said. “Something real sad on television.”

“What was it?” he said.

“It’s all kind of mixed up in my mind,” said Hazel.

“Forget sad things,” said George.

“I always do,” said Hazel.

“That’s my girl,” said George. He winced. There was the sound of a riveting gun in his head.

“Gee—I could tell that one was a doozy,” said Hazel.

“You can say that again,” said George.

“Gee—” said Hazel, “I could tell that one was a doozy.”

The Negro Family:
The Case for National Action

DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN

The removal of legal obstacles to equality of opportunity did not directly lead—and has not yet led—to equal results for African Americans considered as a group. Partly as a result, the demand for greater equality of outcomes has risen—especially in matters economic, where the black-white income gap continues to widen. But already in 1965, in the heady days of the Civil Rights Movement and its legislative victories outlawing overt racial discrimination, a government report called attention to what it called "a new crisis in race relations," based on the need to help the disintegrating black family in order to attain full group equality for African Americans. The report, written by Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1927–2003), Harvard sociologist, author, diplomat, advisor to four presidents, and three-term senator from the state of New York, called for major federal government programs to aid the black family and to help blacks achieve equal success and status in the United States. The present excerpt comprises the report's Preface and Chapter 1 ("The Negro American Revolution"). Although widely attacked for what some called "blaming the victim," the report played a crucial role in expanding the role of the federal government in antipoverty and family welfare programs.

What, according to Moynihan, is "the new crisis in race relations"? What are the primary obstacles to racial equality in outcomes? How does the report justify the "new departure in Federal policy"? What is the new demand for equality? Do not equal liberty and equal opportunity almost guarantee unequal outcomes? If so, can one have both liberty and equality? What should be the role of the federal government in this area, and what its goals and purposes? What, according to Moynihan, are the prospects for racial equality in America?

> Two hundred years ago, in 1765, nine assembled colonies first joined together to demand freedom from arbitrary power.
>
> For the first century we struggled to hold together the first continental union of democracy in the history of man. One hundred years ago, in 1865, following a terrible test of blood and fire, the compact of union was finally sealed.
>
> For a second century we labored to establish a unity of purpose and interest among the many groups which make up the American community.
>
> That struggle has often brought pain and violence. It is not yet over.
>
> *—State of the Union Message, President Lyndon B. Johnson, January 4, 1965*

The United States is approaching a new crisis in race relations.

In the decade that began with the school desegregation decision of the Supreme Court, and ended with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the demand of Negro Americans for full recognition of their civil rights was finally met.

The effort, no matter how savage and brutal, of some State and local governments to thwart the exercise of those rights is doomed. The nation will not put up with it—least of all the Negroes. The present moment will pass. In the meantime, a new period is beginning.

In this new period the expectations of the Negro Americans will go beyond civil rights. Being Americans, they will now expect that in the near future equal opportunities for them as a group will produce roughly equal results, as compared with other groups. This is not going to happen. Nor will it happen for generations to come unless a new and special effort is made.

There are two reasons. First, the racist virus in the American blood stream still afflicts us: Negroes will encounter serious personal prejudice for at least another generation. Second, three centuries of sometimes unimaginable mistreatment have taken their toll on the Negro people. The harsh fact is that as a group, at the present time, in terms of ability to win out in the competitions of American life, they are not equal to most of those groups with which they will be competing. Individually, Negro Americans reach the highest peaks of achievement. But collectively, in the spectrum of American ethnic and religious and regional groups, where some get plenty and some get none, where some send eighty percent of their children to college and others pull them out of school at the 8th grade, Negroes are among the weakest.

The most difficult fact for white Americans to understand is that in these terms the circumstances of the Negro American community in recent years has probably been getting worse, not better.

Indices of dollars of income, standards of living, and years of education deceive. The gap between the Negro and most other groups in American society is widening.

The fundamental problem, in which this is most clearly the case, is that of family structure. The evidence—not final, but powerfully persuasive—is that the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling. A middle-class group has managed to save itself, but for vast numbers of the unskilled, poorly educated city working class the fabric of conventional social relationships has all but disintegrated. There are indications that the situation may have been arrested in the past few years, but the general post-war trend is unmistakable. So long as this situation persists, the cycle of poverty and disadvantage will continue to repeat itself.

The thesis of this paper is that these events, in combination, confront the nation with a new kind of problem. Measures that have worked in the past, or would work for most groups in the present, will not work here. A national effort is required that will give a

unity of purpose to the many activities of the Federal government in this area, directed to a new kind of national goal: the establishment of a stable Negro family structure.

This would be a new departure for Federal policy. And a difficult one. But it almost certainly offers the only possibility of resolving in our time what is, after all, the nation's oldest, and most intransigent, and now its most dangerous social problem. What Gunnar Myrdal[53] said in *An American Dilemma* remains true today: "*America is free to choose whether the Negro shall remain her liability or become her opportunity*. . . ."

The Negro American revolution is rightly regarded as the most important domestic event of the postwar period in the United States.

Nothing like it has occurred since the upheavals of the 1930's which led to the organization of the great industrial trade unions, and which in turn profoundly altered both the economy and the political scene. There have been few other events in our history—the American Revolution itself, the surge of Jacksonian Democracy in the 1830's, the Abolitionist movement, and the Populist movement of the late 19th Century—comparable to the current Negro movement.

There has been none more important. The Negro American revolution holds forth the prospect that the American Republic, which at birth was flawed by the institution of Negro slavery, and which throughout its history has been marred by the unequal treatment of Negro citizens, will at last redeem the full promise of the Declaration of Independence. . . .

The End of the Beginning

The major events of the onset of the Negro revolution are now behind us.

The *political events* were three: First, the Negroes themselves organized as a mass movement. Their organizations have been in some ways better disciplined and better led than any in our history. They have established an unprecedented alliance with religious groups throughout the nation and have maintained close ties with both political parties and with most segments of the trade union movement. Second, the Kennedy-Johnson Administration committed the Federal government to the cause of Negro equality. This had never happened before. Third, the 1964 Presidential election was practically a referendum on this commitment: if these were terms made by the opposition, they were in effect accepted by the President.

The overwhelming victory of President Johnson must be taken as emphatic popular endorsement of the unmistakable, and openly avowed course which the Federal government has pursued under his leadership.

[53] *Karl Gunnar Myrdal (1898–1987) was a Swedish economist and sociologist who, in 1974, received the Nobel Prize for his work in economics. His study on American race relations*—An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy *(1944)—was cited in* Brown v. Board of Education *(1954).*

The *administrative events* were threefold as well: First, beginning with the establishment of the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity and on to the enactment of the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962, the Federal government has launched a major national effort to redress the profound imbalance between the economic position of the Negro citizens and the rest of the nation that derives primarily from their unequal position in the labor market. Second, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 began a major national effort to abolish poverty, a condition in which almost half of Negro families are living. Third, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 marked the end of the era of legal and formal discrimination against Negroes and created important new machinery for combating covert discrimination and unequal treatment. (The Act does not guarantee an end to harassment in matters such as voter registration, but does make it more or less incumbent upon government to take further steps to thwart such efforts when they do occur.)

The *legal events* were no less specific. Beginning with *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, through the decade that culminated in the recent decisions upholding Title II of the Civil Rights Act, the Federal judiciary, led by the Supreme Court, has used every opportunity to combat unequal treatment of Negro citizens. It may be put as a general proposition that the laws of the United States now look upon any such treatment as obnoxious, and that the courts will strike it down wherever it appears.

The Demand for Equality

With these events behind us, the nation now faces a different set of challenges, which may prove more difficult to meet, if only because they cannot be cast as concrete propositions of right and wrong.

The fundamental problem here is that the Negro revolution, like the industrial upheaval of the 1930's, is a movement for equality as well as for liberty.

Liberty and Equality are the twin ideals of American democracy. But they are not the same thing. Nor, most importantly, are they equally attractive to all groups at any given time nor yet are they always compatible, one with the other.

Many persons who would gladly die for liberty are appalled by equality. Many who are devoted to equality are puzzled and even troubled by liberty. Much of the political history of the American nation can be seen as a competition between these two ideals, as for example, the unending troubles between capital and labor.

By and large, liberty has been the ideal with the higher social prestige in America. It has been the middle class aspiration, par excellence. (Note the assertions of the conservative right that ours is a republic, not a democracy.) Equality, on the other hand, has enjoyed tolerance more than acceptance. Yet it has roots deep in Western civilization and "is at least coeval with, if not prior to, liberty in the history of Western political thought."

American democracy has not always been successful in maintaining a balance between these two ideals, and notably so where the Negro American is concerned. "Lincoln freed the slaves," but they were given liberty, not equality. It was therefore possible in the century that followed to deprive their descendants of much of their liberty as well.

The ideal of equality does not ordain that all persons end up, as well as start out equal. In traditional terms, as put by Faulkner, "there is no such thing as equality *per se*, but only equality *to*: equal right and opportunity to make the best one can of one's life within one's capability, without fear of injustice or oppression or threat of violence." But the evolution of American politics, with the distinct persistence of ethnic and religious groups, has added a profoundly significant new dimension to that egalitarian ideal. It is increasingly demanded that the distribution of success and failure within one group be roughly comparable to that within other groups. It is not enough that all individuals start out on even terms, if the members of one group almost invariably end up well to the fore, and those of another far to the rear. This is what ethnic politics are all about in America, and in the main the Negro American demands are being put forth in this now traditional and established framework.

Here a point of semantics must be grasped. The demand for Equality of Opportunity has been generally perceived by white Americans as a demand for liberty, a demand not to be excluded from the competitions of life—at the polling place, in the scholarship examinations, at the personnel office, on the housing market. Liberty does, of course, demand that everyone be free to try his luck, or test his skill in such matters. But these opportunities do not necessarily produce equality: on the contrary, to the extent that winners imply losers, equality of opportunity almost insures inequality of results.

The point of semantics is that equality of opportunity now has a different meaning for Negroes than it has for whites. It is not (or at least no longer) a demand for liberty alone, but also for equality—in terms of group results. In Bayard Rustin's terms, "It is now concerned not merely with removing the barriers to full *opportunity* but with achieving the fact of *equality*." By equality Rustin means a distribution of achievements among Negroes roughly comparable to that among whites.

As Nathan Glazer has put it, "The demand for economic equality is now not the demand for equal opportunities for the equally qualified: it is now the demand for equality of economic results. . . . The demand for equality in education . . . has also become a demand for equality of results, of outcomes."

Some aspects of the new laws do guarantee results, in the sense that upon enactment and enforcement they bring about an objective that is an end in itself, e.g., the public accommodations titles of the Civil Rights Act.

Other provisions are at once terminal and intermediary. The portions of the Civil Rights Act dealing with voting rights will no doubt lead to further enlargements of the freedom of the Negro American.

But by and large, the programs that have been enacted in the first phase of the Negro revolution—Manpower Retraining, the Job Corps, Community Action, et al.—only make opportunities available. They cannot insure the outcome.

The principal challenge of the next phase of the Negro revolution is to make certain that equality of results will now follow. If we do not, there will be no social peace in the United States for generations.

The Prospect for Equality

The time, therefore, is at hand for an unflinching look at the present potential of Negro Americans to move from where they now are to where they want, and ought to be.

There is no very satisfactory way, at present, to measure social health or social pathology within an ethnic, or religious, or geographical community. Data are few and uncertain, and conclusions drawn from them, including the conclusions that follow, are subject to the grossest error. Nonetheless, the opportunities, no less than the dangers, of the present moment, demand that an assessment be made.

That being the case, it has to be said that there is a considerable body of evidence to support the conclusion that Negro social structure, in particular the Negro family, battered and harassed by discrimination, injustice, and uprooting, is in the deepest trouble. While many young Negroes are moving ahead to unprecedented levels of achievement, many more are falling further and further behind.

After an intensive study of the life of central Harlem, the board of directors of Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, Inc. summed up their findings in one statement: "Massive deterioration of the fabric of society and its institutions. . . ."

It is the conclusion of this survey of the available national data, that what is true of central Harlem, can be said to be true of the Negro American world in general.

If this is so, it is the single most important social fact of the United States today.

Family, Religion, and Culture

From *Enough*

JUAN WILLIAMS

Now several decades after Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, the economic and social progress of African Americans has been mixed. Large numbers of blacks have entered the middle class and positions of leadership in business, government, and the arts and sciences. Yet in large segments of the black community, poverty and crime remain high, graduation rates from high school and college remain low, and many people have given up hope of a better life. Explanations and possible remedies for this state of affairs have been the subject of sometimes bitter debate. In these excerpts from his 2006 book,* Enough: The Phony Leaders, Dead-End Movements, and Culture of Failure That Are Undermining Black America—and What We Can Do About It, *award-winning black journalist and author Juan Williams (b. 1954) presents his view of the matter. The book was inspired by comedian Bill Cosby's speech (2004) at the NAACP's celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court's school desegregation decision.*[54]

What, according to Williams, are the major problems facing black Americans today, and what their major causes? What evidence does he cite for his position? Is it convincing? How does he propose addressing these problems? How does he assess the black burden of white racism—yesterday, today, and tomorrow? What does he regard as the best route to black empowerment? Is this a matter requiring a new Civil Rights Movement?

A *New York Times* series on the growing class divide in the nation found that an increasing percentage of the most successful students today are the children of the upper middle class and the rich. "Whatever children inherit from their parents—habits, skills, genes, contacts, money—seems to matter more today," and family structure becomes a class issue in modern America, too, according to the *Times*. The best-educated Americans now have fewer children. They also give birth to those children later in life, when they have more money to spend on the children. This is true for white parents, black parents, and immigrant parents. The gap between money earned by people who graduated from college and money earned by those who did not doubled in the last twenty years. It is becoming harder for poor people to compete.

The good news is that there is a formula for getting out of poverty today. The magical steps begin with finishing high school, but finishing college is much better. Step number two is taking a job and holding it. Step number three is marrying after finishing school and while you have a job. And the final step to give yourself the best chance to avoid poverty is to have children only after you are twenty-one and married. This formula applies to black people and white people alike.

[54] *Video and text for Cosby's speech can be found at* www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/billcosbypoundcakespeech.htm.

The poverty rate for any black man or woman who follows that formula is 6.4 percent. The overall poverty rate for black Americans, based on 2002 census data, the year this analysis was done, was 21.5 percent. In other words, by meeting those basic requirements, black Americans can cut their chances of being poor by two-thirds. This is a consistent pattern. By 2004 the poverty rate for any black man or woman who follows that formula is only 5.8 percent. That compares to an overall poverty rate of 24.7 percent for black people in 2004. Another way to look at it is that a black family that does not meet the requirements will more than triple their chances of being poor. Even white American families have a higher poverty rate (7.8 percent) than black people who finished high school, got married, had children after 21, and worked for at least one week a year. . . .

A 2002 report from the Institute for American Values, a nonpartisan group that studies families, concluded that "marriage is an issue of paramount importance if we wish to help the most vulnerable members of our society: the poor, minorities, and children." The statistical evidence for that claim is strong. Research shows that in 2002 most black children, 68 percent, were born to unwed mothers. Those numbers have real consequences. For example, 35 percent of black women who had a child out of wedlock live in poverty. Only 17 percent of married black women overall are in poverty. In a 2005 report the institute concluded, "Economically, marriage for black Americans is a wealth-creating and poverty-reducing institution. The marital status of African American parents is one of the most powerful determinants of the economic status of African American families. . . ."

The authors noted that over the last fifty years, basically the period after the *Brown* decision, "the percentage of black families headed by married couples declined from 78 percent to 34 percent." In the thirty years from 1950 to 1980, households headed by black women who never married jumped from 3.8 per thousand to 69.7 per thousand. That, too, had real consequences. In 1940, 75 percent of black children lived with both parents. By 1990 only 33 percent of black children lived with a mom and dad—"largely a result of marked increases in the number of never-married black mothers." And there is no question about the impact on black children. With both parents in the house, they do better in school; the children of married people also have fewer run-ins with the police, as well as better self-esteem, and are more likely to enter into marriage before having children. This is a cycle of success creating more success and prosperity.

"For policymakers who care about black America, marriage matters," wrote the authors of the report, a group of black scholars. They called marriage in black America an important strategy for "improving the well-being of African Americans and for strengthening civil society."

Here is [Bill] Cosby at an October 2004 town-hall meeting in Milwaukee: "It is not all right for your fifteen-year-old daughter to have a child," he told black parents. "I'm not talking to you any different from a grandfather who would say, 'I wouldn't do that if I were you.'"

A few days after his controversial speech in May 2004, Cosby wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* that "we don't need another federal commission to study the problem [of black poverty]. Scholars such a W. E. B. Du Bois and John Hope Franklin . . . have already written eloquently on the subject. What we need now is parents sitting down with children, overseeing homework, sending children off to school in the morning well fed, clothed, and ready to learn."

None of this is a matter of arguing over morality, blaming the poor, or excusing "the system" and its racism. Instead, Cosby and the academics are telling poor black people about sure-fire strategies for helping themselves and their families. There is no argument about the facts. If any person, including a black child born in poverty, will go as far as possible in school and show a willingness to work, he will be rewarded with enough money in his pocket to make it almost certain he will never get caught in poverty. If he also builds on the foundation of a strong marriage before having children, he will be rewarded: He will have even more money in his pocket, children who aspire to do well in school, and greatly reduced likelihood of seeing his children in trouble with drugs or having a run-in with the police that leads to jail. . . .

That is why it is important for someone of Bill Cosby's stature to take a risk to get the message out about the road to economic salvation—education, families, and good parenting. That is why it is more than fair for Cosby to proclaim for all the world to hear that poor black people whose children are dropping out of high school, whose daughters are having babies out of wedlock, whose sons are filling up the jails, are not taking advantage of the doors that have opened since the *Brown* decision. When it comes to creating the good life themselves, too many of the poor are acting against their own best interests—they are hurting themselves and the black community.

Why? Again, the heart of the answer is that the poor are not getting important information from civil rights leaders, from politicians, and from their Culture (their music, their movies, their fashion). There is no trusted source with a pulpit or a microphone telling people in need about the path to a better life. There is no one calling this situation a crisis. That is why it was so exceptional for Cosby to raise his voice and say to poor black people "we didn't come from giving up . . . we came from surviving!"

The nation's leading civil rights groups are missing in action in this effort to get out the good news. They claim to be too busy to get the message out. They are locked into arguing that "the system" is causing the continued high level of poverty in black America. Their goal seems to be to get government money for programs, grants, and scholarships for the black community. That money has done some good. But at this point a blind pursuit of government money to help the poor is a tried, failed strategy. It encourages patterns of dependency among black people. It leads to cynicism about what has become of the civil rights movement. In its finest hour the movement appealed to the conscience of the nation, to its ideals, by seeking justice. Now the movement has descended to using racial guilt trips, basically to extort government money for bigger budgets for programs that show no sign of working. The disdain for this shadow of a

formerly great movement is so deep that many Americans, including Cosby, identity these black leaders with their hands out on behalf of the poor as "poverty pimps."

There is no discounting the damage done by slavery and racism. They are a tragically heavy weight of history on black people. And while much of the burden has lifted, it can still be found weighing on black people, through stereotypes and negative images, leaving us at a real disadvantage. But with the *Brown* decision and the passage of civil rights and voting rights laws, the historic damage done by slavery and racism is no longer heavy enough to stop most black people from fighting through the static and making their way to a better life.

The Moral Obligations of Living in a Democratic Society

CORNEL WEST

Few black intellectuals in the United States today command as much attention as prolific author, critic, and activist Cornel West (b. 1953), professor of African American Studies at Princeton University and member of the Democratic Socialists of America. Focusing on race, class, and gender, West is an outspoken critic of contemporary American society in the name of decency and dignity, freedom and democracy. In this essay, West is concerned about the viability of democratic society in America, which he believes is threatened by "a lethal and unprecedented linkage of relative economic decline, cultural decay, and political lethargy."

What does West mean by this diagnosis? Why does he say that democracy necessarily concerns itself with "the role of the most disadvantaged in relation to the public interest"? What does he mean by "cultural decay" or by "the market culture"? Citing specific examples from the text, explain why he thinks our culture is in decline. What are "nonmarket" values, and why does West think they are crucial for democratic societies? What is the difference between a "hood" and a "neighborhood," and does this difference matter? Does the music we listen to affect who we become? What does West mean by saying that "to be part of the democratic tradition is to be a prisoner of hope"?

One of the fundamental questions of our day is whether the tradition of struggle can be preserved and expanded. I refer to the struggle for decency and dignity, the struggle for freedom and democracy.

In *Tradition and Individual Talent* (1919), T. S. Eliot claims that tradition is not something you inherit—if you want it, you must sacrifice for it. In other words, tradition must be fought for. . . .

In any discussion about race matters it is vital to situate yourself in a tradition, in a larger narrative that links the past to the present. When we think of Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Ida Buelle Wells-Barnett, A. Philip Randolph, Marcus Garvey, Ella Baker, James Baldwin,[55] and so many nameless and anonymous ones, we cannot but be moved by their standards of vision and courage. They are wind at one's back.

[55] *Sojourner Truth (1797–1883), African American abolitionist and women's rights activist; Harriet Tubman (1820–1913), African American abolitionist and Union spy during the Civil War who helped rescue more the 70 slaves via the Underground Railroad; Ida Buelle Wells-Barnett (1862–1931), African American journalist and an early leader in the Civil Rights Movement; A. Philip Randolph (1889–1979), leader in the Civil Rights Movement and American labor movement; Marcus Garvey (1887–1940), Jamaican political leader and proponent of black nationalism and Pan-Africanism; Ella Baker (1903–86), African American civil rights and human rights activist; and James Baldwin (1924–87), American novelist and social critic.*

The recovery of a tradition always begins at the existential level, with the experience of what it is to be human under a specific set of circumstances and conditions. It is very difficult to engage in a candid and frank critical discussion about race by assuming it is going to be a rational exchange. Race must be addressed in a form that can deal with its complexity and irrationality.

Perhaps no one understood the existential dimension of being human and African in America better than W. E. B. Du Bois. He recognized the absurd in American society and realized that being Black in America is to be a problem. Du Bois asserted that race in this country is the fetishization of a problem, black bodies in white space. He understood what it meant to be cast as part of a problem people rather than people with problems. Once the humanity of a people is problematized, they are called into question perennially. Their beauty is attacked: wrong hips, lips, noses, skin texture, skin pigmentation, and hair texture. Black intelligence is always guilty before proven innocent in the court of the life of the mind: *The Bell Curve*[56] is just a manifestation of the cycle. Perhaps the gravest injustice is the image of the welfare queen. Looking at the history of black women in America, on the plantation taking care of white children in white households, how is it possible that they could become the symbol of laziness? All of the foregoing are signs of a humanity that has been problematized.

Du Bois also underscored that to be part of a problem people is to be viewed as part of an undifferentiated blob, a monolithic block. Problem people become indistinguishable and interchangeable, which means that only one of them has to be asked to find out what all the rest of them think.

It is rare in human history, of course, that the notion of individuality and the civic are coupled so that a democratic project is generated. For most of history ordinary people have been viewed as "weeds and rain drops," as part of a mob, a rabble, all of which are ways of constituting them as an undifferentiated mob. Even the Greeks, despite their glorious yet truncated democratic experiment, would only apply the tragic to the elite. Ordinary people were limited to the idyllic and the comic, the assumption being that their lives were less complex and one-dimensional.

A democratic sensibility undeniably cuts against the grain of history. Most of human history is the history of elites, of kings, queens, princes, prelates, magistrates, potentates, knights, earls, and squires, all of whom subordinated and exploited everyday people.

This is why it becomes vital to talk about prevailing forms of oligarchy and plutocracy, and to some degree "pigmentocracy," in America. One percent of the population owns 48 percent of the total net financial wealth. The top 10 percent owns 86 percent of the wealth, while the top 20 percent owns 94 percent of the wealth. Meanwhile, 80 percent of the population is experiencing stagnating and declining wages.

[56] *A controversial 1994 book by psychologist Richard J. Herrnstein and political scientist Charles Murray, which argued that human intelligence is substantially influenced by both inherited and environmental factors and that that racial groups may differ from each other in their innate mental capacities.*

Corporations speak glibly about downsizing—bureaucratic language that simply means you do not have a job even though we have the highest profits we have had since 1948. And yet 25 percent of all of America's children live in poverty, and 42 percent of young brown brothers and sisters live in poverty, and 51 percent of young black brothers and sisters live in poverty in the richest nation in the history of the world. These sets of conditions are immoral.

When I examine the present state of American democracy, I believe we are living in one of the most terrifying moments in the history of this nation. We are experiencing a lethal and unprecedented linkage of relative economic decline (i.e., working-class wage stagnation), cultural decay, and political lethargy. No democracy can survive with a middle class so insecure that it is willing to accept any authoritarian option in order to provide some sense of normalcy and security in their lives. It also opens the door for significant segments of that middle class to scapegoat those who are most vulnerable.

It is past time that we consider in our public discourse the civic responsibilities of corporations. There must be prescribed forms of public accountability for institutions that have a disproportionate amount of wealth, power, and influence. This is not a matter of demonizing corporations, but an issue of democratic survival.

We are all in the same boat, on the same turbulent sea. The boat has a huge leak in it and in the end, we go up and down together. A corporate executive recently said to me, "We are not in the same boat. We're global." His response suggests why it is vital to inquire when corporate commercial interests must be subordinate to the public interest.

Democracy always raises the fundamental question: What is the role of the most disadvantaged in relation to the public interest? It is similar in some ways to the biblical question: What are you to do with the least of these? If we do not want to live in a democracy, we are not obliged to raise that question. In fact, the aristocracy does not address that question at all. Chekhov wrote in a play, "The Czar's police, they don't give a damn about raising that question. That's not the kind of society they are." But within a democratic society that question must be continually raised and pushed.

The conversation matters because the preservation of democracy is threatened by real economic decline. While it is not identical to moral and cultural decay, it is inseparable from it. Even though the pocketbook is important, many Americans are concerned more about the low quality of their lives, the constant fear of violent assault and cruel insult, the mean-spiritedness and coldheartedness of social life, and the inability to experience deep levels of intimacy. These are the signs of a culturally decadent civilization.

By *decadent* I mean the relative erosion of systems of nurturing and caring, which affects each of us, but which has an especially devastating impact on young people. Any civilization that is unable to sustain its networks of caring and nurturing will generate enough anger and aggression to make communication near impossible. The result is a society in which we do not even respect each other enough to listen to each other. Dialogue is the lifeblood of democracy and is predicated on certain bonds of trust and respect. At this moment of cultural decay, it is difficult to find places where those ties of sympathy may be nurtured.

The roots of democracy are fundamentally grounded in mutual respect, personal responsibility, and social accountability. Yet democracy is also about giving each person a dignified voice in the decision-making processes in those institutions that guide and regulate their lives. These deeply moral suppositions have a certain spiritual dimension. John Dewey and Josiah Royce,[57] among others, identified a spirituality of genuine questioning and dialogical exchange that allows us to transcend our egocentric predicaments. Spirituality requires an experience of something bigger than our individual selves that binds us to a community. It could be in an authoritarian bind, of course, which is why the kind of spiritual and moral awakening that is necessary for a democracy to function is based on a sense of the public—a sense of what it is to be a citizen among citizens.

Nurturing spirituality is so difficult today because we are bombarded by a market culture that evolves around buying and selling, promoting and advertising. The market tries to convince us that we are really alive only when we are addicted to stimulation and titillation. Given the fact that so much of American culture revolves around sexual foreplay and orgiastic intensity, for many people the good life might mean being hooked up to an orgasm machine and being perennially titillated.

The ultimate logic of a market culture is the gangsterization of culture: I want power now. I want pleasure now. I want property now. Your property. Give it to me.

Young black people call their block a "hood" now. I grew up in a neighborhood; it is a big difference. A neighborhood was a place not only for the nuclear family, but also included aunts and uncles, friends and neighbors, rabbis and priests, deacons and pastors, Little League coaches and dance teachers—all of whom served as a backdrop for socializing young people. This backdrop provided children with a sense of what it is to be human, with all its decency, integrity, and compassion. When those values are practiced, a neighborhood emerges.

Unfortunately, neighborhoods often took shape in my boyhood under patriarchal and homophobic conditions, and that history must be called into question. Still, we must recover its flow of nonmarket values and nonmarket activity.

These days we cannot even talk about love the way James Baldwin and Martin Luther King Jr. did. Nobody wants to hear that syrupy, mushy stuff. James Baldwin, however, said love is the most dangerous discourse in the world. It is daring and difficult because it makes you vulnerable, but if you experience it, it is the peak of human existence.

In our own time it is becoming extremely difficult for nonmarket values to gain a foothold. Parenting is a nonmarket activity; so much sacrifice and service goes into it without any assurance that the providers will get anything back. Mercy, justice; they are nonmarket. Care, service; nonmarket. Solidarity, fidelity; nonmarket. Sweetness and kindness and gentleness. All nonmarket.

In the last decade we have witnessed within popular culture wonderful innovation in forms of hip hop and rap. Compare that phenomenon to the 1960s when the Black

[57] *John Dewey (1859–1952) and Josiah Royce (1855–1916) are American philosophers.*

Panther Party emerged and note the big difference between the two movements. One has to do with sacrifice, paying the price, dealing with the consequences as you bring power and pressure to bear on the prevailing status quo. The other has to do with marketing black rage. One movement had forty-seven local branches across the nation, the other sells millions of albums and CDs. The comparison is not a matter of patronizing this generation. Frankly, it is a critique of each us who has to deal with this market culture and through market mechanisms try to preserve some nonmarket values.

What then are we to do? There is no overnight solution or panacea, of course. We need to begin with something profoundly un-American, namely, recalling a sense of history, a very deep, tragic, and comic sense of history, a historical sensibility linked to empathy. Empathy is not simply a matter of trying to imagine what others are going through, but having the will to muster enough courage to do something about it. In a way, empathy is predicated upon hope.

Hope has nothing to do with optimism. I am in no way optimistic about America, nor am I optimistic about the plight of the human species on this globe. There is simply not enough evidence that allows me to infer that things are going to get better. That has been the perennial state and condition of not simply black people in America, but all self-conscious human beings who are sensitive to the forms of evil around them. We can be prisoners of hope even as we call optimism into question.

To be part of the democratic tradition is to be a prisoner of hope. And you cannot be a prisoner of hope without engaging in a form of struggle in the present moment that keeps the best of the past alive. To engage in that struggle means that one is always willing to acknowledge that there is no triumph around the corner, but that you persist because you believe it is right and just and moral. As T. S. Eliot said, "Ours is in the trying. The rest is not our business."

We are not going to save each other, ourselves, America, or the world. But we certainly can leave it a little bit better. As my grandmother used to say, "If the Kingdom of God is within you, then everywhere you go, you ought to leave a little Heaven behind."

Dreaming of a Black Christmas

GERALD EARLY

For many years, American blacks have been trying to make sense of their identity as African and American, and much effort has been spent to establish connections to their forgotten African roots, partly in negative reaction to the "imposed" American holidays and Christian rituals, partly in positive search for a lost ancestral culture. In this essay, Gerald Lyn Early (b. 1952), professor of English and head of the African American Studies Program at Washington University in St. Louis, discusses one prominent expression of this search for a more authentic African American culture and religion, the holiday of Kwanzaa.

According to Early, the holiday of Kwanzaa "bestows the gifts of therapy." What is it that requires therapy? How does the "therapy" work? How well does Early think that Kwanzaa cures or heals? What does he mean by claiming that Kwanzaa "trivializes the very heritage that it is trying to make sacred"? Consider the seven principles/beliefs that inform the holiday of Kwanzaa. Are they at odds with either American or Christian principles? Why does Early, as a Christian, resist the rituals and symbols of Kwanzaa? Why in the end does he relent, appearing to change his mind about the value of the holiday? After expressing gratitude for a "moment of uncontrived human connection"—an undying memory of his sister at a Christmas past—triggered by a recent Kwanzaa celebration, he generalizes: "What else is Kwanzaa, Christmas, or any other holiday, in the end, good for?" Is the main purpose of our national holidays the evoking of private personal memories? Is this why we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day?

For the past five or six years, in my position as head of the African-American studies program at the university where I teach, I've been invited by the black students on campus to take part in their annual celebration of Kwanzaa, the African-American holiday that is gaining in popularity each year. The festivities, which are usually celebrated during the seven days between December 26 and January 1, are compressed, for the students, purposes, into one evening. The ceremony takes place in one of the campus's cafeterias. All the trappings of a somber religious occasion are there: candles, a mat, a ritual cup, remarks to the gathered celebrants.

Because Kwanzaa is designed to connect African Americans to their African heritage, the colors and symbols of that continent predominate. Kente cloth is ubiquitous, as are the red, black, and green of Marcus Garvey's Pan-African flag. Gifts of nuts, fruits, and vegetables, which are meant to recall African harvest festivals, are placed on the mat. Corn, a symbol of children, is also offered, to remind us that we are responsible to the youngest of the community.

Read the essay here: http://harpers.org/archive/1997/01/dreaming-of-a-black-christmas/.

Everyday Use

ALICE WALKER

Families are teachers of culture and the transmitters of tradition. As we go forward into an uncharted future, and whether we know it or not, we carry our past with us in many ways—in the homes and families of our origin, in the names we are given, in the heirlooms we inherit. Yet in times of rapid cultural change and ferment, ties to families are stretched thin; old traditions are abandoned for new religious and cultural forms—or, sometimes, for nothing at all. These phenomena raise special challenges for contemporary black Americans, as they face choices regarding how much to retain of their familial, religious, and cultural roots—roots that, for many, have been twisted by the experience of racial prejudice and oppression. Nevertheless, as novelist Alice Walker (b. 1944) makes clear in this story (1973), how we treat our inheritances speaks volumes about who we are and how we stand in the world. The story is narrated by an unschooled, hardworking black woman with two daughters, one now a woman of the world—stylish, sophisticated, with a new sense of self—the other a homebody—slow, timid, attached to the humble ways of her rural roots. The climax of the story concerns who shall have, and how to use, the handmade family quilts: Dee (now sporting a new African name, Wangero), who intends to hang them on her walls, or Maggie (to whom they've been promised), who would use them on her marriage bed.

In whose hands is the family's tradition better respected? What is the meaning of the quilts, and why might they matter? In this instance, how might hanging the quilts on the wall support Dee's newly assumed African identity? In general, is our cultural and religious inheritance something to be admired on a wall, something to wrap ourselves in, or something inside and knitted together with us? What is sacred to us? How should we honor and transmit our legacies? Can Americans—white or black—do without them? Is it possible—is it desirable—to "re-invent" one's past and one's inheritance?

I will wait for her in the yard that Maggie and I made so clean and wavy yesterday afternoon. A yard like this is more comfortable than most people know. It is not just a yard. It is like an extended living room. When the hard clay is swept clean as a floor and the fine sand around the edges lined with tiny, irregular grooves, anyone can come and sit and look up into the elm tree and wait for the breezes that never come inside the house.

Maggie will be nervous until after her sister goes: she will stand hopelessly in corners, homely and ashamed of the burn scars down her arms and legs, eying her sister with a mixture of envy and awe. She thinks her sister has held life always in the palm of one hand, that "no" is a word the world never learned to say to her.

You've no doubt seen those TV shows where the child who has "made it" is confronted, as a surprise, by her own mother and father, tottering in weakly from backstage. (A pleasant surprise, of course: What would they do if parent and child came on the show only to curse out and insult each other?) On TV mother and child embrace

and smile into each other's faces. Sometimes the mother and father weep, the child wraps them in her arms and leans across the table to tell how she would not have made it without their help. I have seen these programs.

Sometimes I dream a dream in which Dee and I are suddenly brought together on a TV program of this sort. Out of a dark and soft-seated limousine I am ushered into a bright room filled with many people. There I meet a smiling, gray, sporty man like Johnny Carson who shakes my hand and tells me what a fine girl I have. Then we are on the stage and Dee is embracing me with tears in her eyes. She pins on my dress a large orchid, even though she has told me once that she thinks orchids are tacky flowers.

In real life I am a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands. In the winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day. I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man. My fat keeps me hot in zero weather. I can work outside all day, breaking ice to get water for washing; I can eat pork liver cooked over the open fire minutes after it comes steaming from the hog. One winter I knocked a bull calf straight in the brain between the eyes with a sledge hammer and had the meat hung up to chill before nightfall. But of course all this does not show on television. I am the way my daughter would want me to be: a hundred pounds lighter, my skin like an uncooked barley pancake. My hair glistens in the hot bright lights. Johnny Carson has much to do to keep up with my quick and witty tongue.

But that is a mistake. I know even before I wake up. Who ever knew a Johnson with a quick tongue? Who can even imagine me looking a strange white man in the eye? It seems to me I have talked to them always with one foot raised in flight, with my head turned in whichever way is farthest from them. Dee, though. She would always look anyone in the eye. Hesitation was no part of her nature.
"How do I look, Mama?" Maggie says, showing just enough of her thin body enveloped in pink skirt and red blouse for me to know she's there, almost hidden by the door.

"Come out into the yard," I say.

Have you ever seen a lame animal, perhaps a dog run over by some careless person rich enough to own a car, sidle up to someone who is ignorant enough to be kind to him? That is the way my Maggie walks. She has been like this, chin on chest, eyes on ground, feet in shuffle, ever since the fire that burned the other house to the ground.

Dee is lighter than Maggie, with nicer hair and a fuller figure. She's a woman now, though sometimes I forget. How long ago was it that the other house burned? Ten, twelve years? Sometimes I can still hear the flames and feel Maggie's arms sticking to me, her hair smoking and her dress falling off her in little black papery flakes. Her eyes seemed stretched open, blazed open by the flames reflected in them. And Dee. I see her standing off under the sweet gum tree she used to dig gum out of; a look of concentration on her face as she watched the last dingy gray board of the house fall in toward the red-hot brick chimney. Why don't you do a dance around the ashes? I'd wanted to ask her. She had hated the house that much.

I used to think she hated Maggie, too. But that was before we raised money, the church and me, to send her to Augusta to school. She used to read to us without pity; forcing words, lies, other folks’ habits, whole lives upon us two, sitting trapped and ignorant underneath her voice. She washed us in a river of make-believe, burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn’t necessarily need to know. Pressed us to her with the serious way she read, to shove us away at just the moment, like dimwits, we seemed about to understand.

Dee wanted nice things. A yellow organdy dress to wear to her graduation from high school; black pumps to match a green suit she’d made from an old suit somebody gave me. She was determined to stare down any disaster in her efforts. Her eyelids would not flicker for minutes at a time. Often I fought off the temptation to shake her. At sixteen she had a style of her own: and knew what style was.

I never had an education myself. After second grade the school was closed down. Don’t ask me why: in 1927 colored asked fewer questions than they do now. Sometimes Maggie reads to me. She stumbles along good-naturedly but can’t see well. She knows she is not bright. Like good looks and money, quickness passes her by. She will marry John Thomas (who has mossy teeth in an earnest face) and then I’ll be free to sit here and I guess just sing church songs to myself. Although I never was a good singer. Never could carry a tune. I was always better at a man’s job. I used to love to milk till I was hooked in the side in ’49. Cows are soothing and slow and don’t bother you, unless you try to milk them the wrong way.

I have deliberately turned my back on the house. It is three rooms, just like the one that burned, except the roof is tin; they don’t make shingle roofs any more. There are no real windows, just some holes cut in the sides, like the portholes in a ship, but not round and not square, with rawhide holding the shutters up on the outside. This house is in a pasture, too, like the other one. No doubt when Dee sees it she will want to tear it down. She wrote me once that no matter where we “choose” to live, she will manage to come see us. But she will never bring her friends. Maggie and I thought about this and Maggie asked me, “Mama, when did Dee ever *have* any friends?”

She had a few. Furtive boys in pink shirts hanging about on washday after school. Nervous girls who never laughed. Impressed with her they worshiped the well-turned phrase, the cute shape, the scalding humor that erupted like bubbles in lye. She read to them.

When she was courting Jimmy T she didn’t have much time to pay to us, but turned all her faultfinding power on him. He *flew* to marry a cheap city girl from a family of ignorant flashy people. She hardly had time to recompose herself.

When she comes I will meet—but there they are!

Maggie attempts to make a dash for the house, in her shuffling way, but I stay her with my hand. "Come back here," I say. And she stops and tries to dig a well in the sand with her toe.

It is hard to see them clearly through the strong sun. But even the first glimpse of leg out of the car tells me it is Dee. Her feet were always neat-looking, as if God himself had shaped them with a certain style. From the other side of the car comes a short, stocky man. Hair is all over his head a foot long and hanging from his chin like a kinky mule tail. I hear Maggie suck in her breath. "Uhnnnh," is what it sounds like. Like when you see the wriggling end of a snake just in front of your foot on the road. "Uhnnnh."

Dee next. A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun. I feel my whole face warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings gold, too, and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up to shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits. The dress is loose and flows, and as she walks closer, I like it. I hear Maggie go "Uhnnnh" again. It is her sister's hair. It stands straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pigtails that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears.

"Wa-su-zo-Tean-o![58]" she says, coming on in that gliding way the dress makes her move. The short stocky fellow with the hair to his navel is all grinning and he follows up with "Asalamalakim,[59] my mother and sister!" He moves to hug Maggie but she falls back, right up against the back of my chair. I feel her trembling there and when I look up I see the perspiration falling off her chin.

"Don't get up," says Dee. Since I am stout it takes something of a push. You can see me trying to move a second or two before I make it. She turns, showing white heels through her sandals, and goes back to the car. Out she peeks next with a Polaroid. She stoops down quickly and lines up picture after picture of me sitting there in front of the house with Maggie cowering behind me. She never takes a shot without making sure the house is included. When a cow comes nibbling around the edge of the yard she snaps it and me and Maggie *and* the house. Then she puts the Polaroid in the back seat of the car, and comes up and kisses me on the forehead.

Meanwhile Asalamalakim is going through motions with Maggie's hand. Maggie's hand is as limp as a fish, and probably as cold, despite the sweat, and she keeps trying to pull it back. It looks like Asalamalakim wants to shake hands but wants to do it fancy. Or maybe he don't know how people shake hands. Anyhow, he soon gives up on Maggie.

"Well," I say. "Dee."

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[58] *A Swahili greeting used by Black Muslims.*

[59] *An Arabic phrase, roughly, "Peace be with you."*

“No, Mama,” she says. “Not ‘Dee,’ Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!”
“What happened to ‘Dee’?” I wanted to know.

“She’s dead,” Wangero said. “I couldn’t bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me.”

“You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie,” I said. Dicie is my sister. She named Dee. We called her “Big Dee” after Dee was born.

“But who was *she* named after?” asked Wangero.

“I guess after Grandma Dee,” I said.

“And who was she named after?” asked Wangero.

“Her mother,” I said, and saw Wangero was getting tired. “That’s about as far back as I can trace it,” I said. Though, in fact, I probably could have carried it back beyond the Civil War through the branches.

“Well,” said Asalamalakim, “there you are.”

“Uhnnnh,” I heard Maggie say.

“There I was not,” I said, “before ‘Dicie’ cropped up in our family, so why should I try to trace it that far back?”

He just stood there grinning, looking down on me like somebody inspecting a Model A car. Every once in a while he and Wangero sent eye signals over my head.

“How do you pronounce this name?” I asked.

“You don’t have to call me by it if you don’t want to,” said Wangero.

“Why shouldn’t I?” I asked. “If that’s what you want us to call you, we’ll call you.”

“I know it might sound awkward at first,” said Wangero.

“I’ll get used to it,” I said. “Ream it out again.”
Well, soon we got the name out of the way. Asalamalakim had a name twice as long and three times as hard. After I tripped over it two or three times he told me to just call him Hakim-a-barber. I wanted to ask him was he a barber, but I didn’t really think he was, so I didn’t ask.

“You must belong to those beef-cattle peoples down the road,” I said. They said “Asalamalakim” when they met you, too, but they didn’t shake hands. Always too busy: feeding the cattle, fixing the fences, putting up salt-lick shelters, throwing down hay.

When the white folks poisoned some of the herd the men stayed up all night with rifles in their hands. I walked a mile and a half just to see the sight.

Hakim-a-barber said, "I accept some of their doctrines, but farming and raising cattle is not my style." (They didn't tell me, and I didn't ask, whether Wangero (Dee) had really gone and married him.)

We sat down to eat and right away he said he didn't eat collards and pork was unclean. Wangero, though, went on through the chitlins and corn bread, the greens and everything else. She talked a blue streak over the sweet potatoes. Everything delighted her. Even the fact that we still used the benches her daddy made for the table when we couldn't afford to buy chairs.

"Oh, Mama!" she cried. Then turned to Hakim-a-barber. "I never knew how lovely these benches are. You can feel the rump prints," she said, running her hands underneath her and along the bench. Then she gave a sigh and her hand closed over Grandma Dee's butter dish. "That's it!" she said. "I knew there was something I wanted to ask you if I could have." She jumped up from the table and went over in the corner where the churn stood, the milk in it clabber by now. She looked at the churn and looked at it.

"This churn top is what I need," she said. "Didn't Uncle Buddy whittle it out of a tree you all used to have?"

"Yes," I said.

"Un huh," she said happily. "And I want the dasher, too."

"Uncle Buddy whittle that, too?" asked the barber.

Dee (Wangero) looked up at me.

"Aunt Dee's first husband whittled the dash," said Maggie so low you almost couldn't hear her. "His name was Henry, but they called him Stash."

"Maggie's brain is like an elephant's," Wangero said, laughing. "I can use the chute top as a centerpiece for the alcove table," she said, sliding a plate over the chute, "and I'll think of something artistic to do with the dasher."

When she finished wrapping the dasher the handle stuck out. I took it for a moment in my hands. You didn't even have to look close to see where hands pushing the dasher up and down to make butter had left a kind of sink in the wood. In fact, there were a lot of small sinks; you could see where thumbs and fingers had sunk into the wood. It was beautiful light yellow wood, from a tree that grew in the yard where Big Dee and Stash had lived.

After dinner Dee (Wangero) went to the trunk at the foot of my bed and started rifling through it. Maggie hung back in the kitchen over the dishpan. Out came Wangero with two quilts. They had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell’s paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra’s uniform that he wore in the Civil War.

“Mama,” Wangro said sweet as a bird. “Can I have these old quilts?”

I heard something fall in the kitchen, and a minute later the kitchen door slammed.

“Why don’t you take one or two of the others?” I asked. “These old things was just done by me and Big Dee from some tops your grandma pieced before she died.”

“No,” said Wangero. “I don’t want those. They are stitched around the borders by machine.”

“That’ll make them last better,” I said.

“That’s not the point,” said Wangero. “These are all pieces of dresses Grandma used to wear. She did all this stitching by hand. Imagine!” She held the quilts securely in her arms, stroking them.

“Some of the pieces, like those lavender ones, come from old clothes her mother handed down to her,” I said, moving up to touch the quilts. Dee (Wangero) moved back just enough so that I couldn’t reach the quilts. They already belonged to her.

“Imagine!” she breathed again, clutching them closely to her bosom.

“The truth is,” I said, “I promised to give them quilts to Maggie, for when she marries John Thomas.”

She gasped like a bee had stung her.

“Maggie can’t appreciate these quilts!” she said. “She’d probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use.”

“I reckon she would,” I said. “God knows I been saving ’em for long enough with nobody using ’em. I hope she will!” I didn’t want to bring up how I had offered Dee (Wangero) a quilt when she went away to college. Then she had told me they were old-fashioned, out of style.

“But they’re *priceless*!” she was saying now, furiously; for she has a temper. “Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they’d be in rags. Less than that!”

"She can always make some more," I said. "Maggie knows how to quilt."

Dee (Wangero) looked at me with hatred. "You just will not understand. The point is these quilts, *these* quilts!"

"Well," I said, stumped. "What would *you* do with them?"

"Hang them," she said. As if that was the only thing you *could* do with quilts.

Maggie by now was standing in the door. I could almost hear the sound her feet made as they scraped over each other.

"She can have them, Mama," she said, like somebody used to never winning anything, or having anything reserved for her. "I can 'member Grandma Dee without the quilts."

I looked at her hard. She had filled her bottom lip with checkerberry snuff and it gave her face a kind of dopey, hangdog look. It was Grandma Dee and Big Dee who taught her how to quilt herself. She stood there with her scarred hands hidden in the folds of her skirt. She looked at her sister with something like fear but she wasn't mad at her. This was Maggie's portion. This was the way she knew God to work.

When I looked at her like that something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet. Just like when I'm in church and the spirit of God touches me and I get happy and shout. I did something I never done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap. Maggie just sat there on my bed with her mouth open.

"Take one or two of the others," I said to Dee.

But she turned without a word and went out to Hakim-a-barber.

"You just don't understand," she said, as Maggie and I came out to the car.

"What don't I understand?" I wanted to know.

"Your heritage," she said. And then she turned to Maggie, kissed her, and said, "You ought to try to make something of yourself, too, Maggie. It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live you'd never know it."

She put on some sunglasses that hid everything above the tip of her nose and chin.

Maggie smiled; maybe at the sunglasses. But a real smile, not scared. After we watched the car dust settle I asked Maggie to bring me a dip of snuff. And then the two of us sat there just enjoying, until it was time to go in the house and go to bed.

Identity

Growing Up Colored

HENRY LOUIS GATES JR.

In Chapter Two, the selections by W. E. B. Du Bois, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, and Zora Neale Hurston all addressed questions of divided personal identity as experienced by African Americans living in the period of state-sponsored segregation and racial discrimination. But the end of those abusive practices has not eliminated issues of divided identity for many African Americans. All of the readings in this final section of the book, each by a prominent contemporary black thinker, look at those issues in the post-segregation age.

In his personal memoir (2012), "Growing Up Colored," the distinguished literary critic, educator, author, and director of Harvard University's W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research, Henry Louis Gates Jr. (b. 1950), describes his boyhood in Piedmont, West Virginia "where I learned to be a colored boy." In the short concluding passages excerpted here, Gates speaks about his sense of identity half a century—and much personal acclaim—later.

Why does Gates feel a special affinity with any black American he meets on the street? Why might he distrust this reflex to signal immediate racial kinship? Can one justify "racial pride" without accepting "racial recrimination"? Do either or both of these feelings make sense? What does it mean to "construct" different identities based on "elective affinities"? At the end, Gates, acknowledging his dividedness, says that he wants "to luxuriate in whatever I might be calling blackness," but to do so "in order to come out on the other side to experience a humanity that is neither colorless nor reducible to color." What would such humanity feel like? Is it possible? Does humanity, as such, have color? Can—should—racial or ethnic identity be transcended?

One summer recently, I sat at a sidewalk cafe in Italy, and three or four "black" Italians walked casually by, as well as a dozen or more blacker Africans. Each spoke to me; rather, each nodded his head slightly or acknowledged me by a glance, ever so subtly. When I was growing up, we always did this with each other, ships passing in a sea of white folk.

Read the essay here: http://www.americanheritage.com/content/growing-colored.

How Can We Save the African-American Race? from *Losing the Race*

JOHN MCWHORTER

Identity and self-conception—who we think we are and what we think of ourselves—matters much, both for personal happiness and for worldly success. The identity of both individuals and groups is determined partly by how we see ourselves, partly by how others see us. This subject has long concerned the American linguist and political commentator, John McWhorter (b. 1965), who has published widely on language and race relations. This excerpted essay is taken from his book, Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America *(2000).*

Why does McWhorter believe that "Black America is mired in a detour . . . from the path to the mountaintop that Martin Luther King envisioned"? To what does he attribute the low esteem in which blacks are held—and hold themselves—in modern America? What does he mean by "Victimology," "Separatism," and "Anti-intellectualism"? What are their effects on the self-understanding and approach to life of black Americans, and on the perception of blacks by American society? Why does McWhorter say that white racism is no longer the main obstacle to black advancement? What, according to McWhorter, is the second phase of the Civil Rights Movement, and what would it involve—both regarding ends and means?

Black America is currently mired in a detour, intended by neither blacks nor whites, from the path to the mountaintop that Martin Luther King envisioned. Having been taught to cherish victimhood over action and essentialism over universalism, a great many people of the second black generation after the Civil Rights Movement are being hindered in continuing the struggle our ancestors initiated on our behalf.

Indeed, it is Victimology, Separatism, and Anti-intellectualism that make it a stretch for whites to think of that suburban black corporate manager as a representative "American" even three decades after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, even though there are millions of black managers, and even though in general most black people are not poor. Surely, remnants of racism contribute to this state of affairs. However, today, the ideology that so many black Americans have been steeped in contributes much more to this sense of "black" as "different" and, most importantly, "less." Victimology, the tendency to exaggerate the degree of black oppression regardless of progress, has understandable roots in the Civil Rights Movement freeing a group with a battered self-image. But white people are no more prone than black people (or any others) to dutifully frame all present-tense experience through a fine historical lens. As such, to the younger white person who never knew segregated America, watching middle-class black people depicting themselves as partners with Kosovar Albanians in victimhood because they are occasionally bypassed by a taxi in Manhattan or trailed by a salesclerk looks like paranoia. Separatism starts as a healthy reclamation of identity and is then distorted by Victimology into what is felt to be a necessary battle posture, but to modern white eyes,

Separatism is parochial. Anti-intellectualism has been such an inevitable development of Separatism in black America that its failure to shackle the race would be nothing less than surprising, but just as inevitably, to any outsider it can only look like mental inferiority.

Paranoid, parochial, and dumb: This is how much of white America perceives us on some level. It is not our fault, and it is absolutely unacceptable. In fact, it was indignation at this perception that led me to write this book. However, the reason they believe this is no longer, in any meaningful sense, good old-fashioned racism—the terrain has changed profoundly since the 1960s. I sincerely and regretfully believe that at this complex juncture in American history, black America has unintentionally become as much a cause of this as the racism that led whites to drag us to these shores and treat us as animals for 350 years. Sure, "They started it." Not only did they bring us here as slaves, but they also kept it going—most ironically—by finally seeing the light and letting us free!

As direct consequences of the abrupt unshackling of a crippled race, Victimology, Separatism, and Anti-intellectualism are a person with his eyes sealed shut still pawing frantically at the air long after his attacker has laid off, driven to frenzy by massive assault. But thank God the attacker did let up. And the unjust fact is that once he has, he walks on unharmed, while it is up to us to stand up, rub our eyes, brush ourselves off, and walk on to do the best work and lead the best lives we can. We do ourselves no favor by collapsing again to the ground, shutting our eyes, and pawing at the air some more for the absolution of letting everyone know what the attacker did, and certainly not by deciding that we are to live our lives in that position as a remembrance of history. Sure, every now and then the attacker is going to traipse back and pop us on the back of the head. But we can take it, can't we? Take one look at the classic picture of a slave ship in cross-section and that question is answered.

In the meantime, to continue swiping madly at the air and indignantly insisting that this is one's right in view of an attack that recedes increasingly into the past makes one look not fearsome, but pathetic, a lesser person. In that light, certainly the last thing the African-American race ought to do after having coming so far is to nurture the very racism that kept us in chains for 350 years. Yet this is what I fear has become the case.

Common wisdom frames black children of all classes as living under the risk of the depredations of racism, enjoying a brief window of childhood innocence before becoming aware of their status as second-class citizens. I find myself seeing black children as living under a concurrent risk, that of being stunted in their ability to make the best of themselves as they are shepherded into a conviction that regardless of outward appearances, they inhabit a fundamentally hostile, alien nation.

There are two black boys who play in the yard behind my apartment. To describe anyone living in this building as "struggling blue collar" would be a stretch by any standard. But I wonder how long it will be before they learn the gospel—that most black people are poor, that white people are generally not to be trusted out of earshot, that school is an inherently "white" endeavor that they ought to dwell in only for utilitarian

reasons. The torch is being passed on independently of external conditions. We cannot let this happen.

We're Past "Talking"

I find it sadly unlikely that dialogue, along the lines of Bill Clinton's "National Dialogue on Race," will be of any significant use. The hold of the three currents in thought is so strong that it conditions an assumption among most blacks in power that such a dialogue can only be occasion for reminding whites that they are racists, and among most whites that their only acceptable participation is to agree.

Indeed, one is forced to conclude that a great many of today's black leaders are unamenable to any meaningful dialogue on race. A disproportionately influential contingent will maintain to their dying day that most black Americans are poor, that there is a racist at the heart of all whites, and that because of these things, regardless of class or opportunity, no black American is to be held to mainstream standards of morality or academic achievement. There are now roughly two generations of African Americans caught in these thought patterns—those who came of age as the Civil Rights Movement dawned, and now a whole subsequent generation who have spent their lifetimes in a climate which encourages victimhood as an identity rather than as a problem.

This frame of mind is so deeply rooted in these people's very souls that to let it go would entail a massive sociopsychological dislocation few human beings are capable of or willing to endure. There are many African-American leaders and thinkers who are fighting the good fight, watching our backs and chronicling the remnants of racism while acknowledging progress and refusing to settle for allowing the race to be represented by fruitless melodramatics. Examples include economist Glenn Loury, *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert, *Atlanta Constitution* columnist Cynthia Tucker, law professor Randall Kennedy, and essaying Stanley Crouch. These people are often dismissed as sell-outs by many who mistake as Doing the Right Thing figures such as Derrick Bell, June Jordan, Manning Marable, Ralph Wiley, Lani Guinier, Maxine Waters, Al Sharpton, and Carl Rowan.[60] Yet while the emergence of this kind of person served a purpose in getting blacks in the door and to the table, ironically, this type is now the main agent in keeping blacks from ever getting up from the table and moving on. Maybe it had to be this way. However, what this means is that we cannot look to them to get us out of these holding patterns. The key is what kind of America we set up for the generations of black people to come, and it would be truly unfortunate if that were an America where people of this frame of mind continued to dominate the political and intellectual leadership of the race.

[60] *Derrick Albert Bell Jr. (1930–2011), the first tenured African American Professor of Law at Harvard Law School and one of the originators of critical race theory; June Jordan (1936–2002), a Caribbean-American writer and activist; William Manning Marable (1950–2011), a professor of African American Studies at Columbia University and author of a biography of Malcolm X; Ralph Wiley (1952–2004), a journalist and sportswriter; Lani Guinier (b. 1950), an American lawyer and civil rights activist; Maxine Waters (b. 1938), US Representative for California's 43rd congressional district; Al Sharpton (b. 1954), Baptist minister, activist, and television/radio talk show host; and Carl Rowan (1925–2000), an op-ed columnist for the* Washington Post *and the* Chicago Sun-Times.

I have two suggestions that I think will get us back on the only track worthy of this, or any other race, which is progress. Both entail that America enter upon what can be regarded as the second phase of the Civil Rights Movement. The first phase is to level the proverbial playing field. This job is nearly accomplished. The second phase is for us to get out there and play, and in order for that to be worthwhile, or even possible, then *we must be treated as equals, and we must allow ourselves to be treated as equals*.

It seems to be assumed that this was a *fait accompli* once the playing field was leveled. But black American history was run through with too epic an injustice for this alone to accomplish our goal. There remains work no less intimidating, but no less imperative, than that which we have already done.

The Black Table, the Empty Suit, and the Tie

STEPHEN L. CARTER

Few of our contemporaries have written more thoughtfully about their efforts to describe and ground their own black identity than Stephen L. Carter (b. 1954), Yale professor of law, public policy writer, journalist, bestselling novelist, and author of Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby (1991)*. In this 1994 essay, "The Black Table, the Empty Seat, and the Tie," Carter tenaciously pursues questions of personal identity: "Who exactly are we, dark-skinned lawyers in a white-skinned profession? . . . Yes, we are black . . . but* how *are we black?" After describing, via reflections about "the empty seat," how society around him compels him to face his blackness, he proceeds to discuss why he, quite on his own,* claims*, his black personal identity. After a discussion (not included here) on "professionalism and professional identity," he concludes with a discussion of assimilation.*

What does Carter conclude from his meditations on the empty seat? Why is it important to Carter to claim his blackness? What, for Carter, is the basis of and reason for his racial solidarity? What does he mean when he says that such solidarity "can be the bridge between our roots and our destinations?" What, according to Carter, are the costs of efforts to assimilate? What, finally, does Carter mean when he speaks about claiming one's people as a form of familial love, expressible—like the literal love of family members—in myriad ways? What are the strengths and weaknesses of such "love of your own," just because it is yours? Is racial sameness a good reason for loving anyone?

Once or twice, when I was in law school, the "black table" (as we called our solidaritied corner of the dining hall) was torn by debate, passionate but friendly, over the question of how we should think of ourselves: as black people who happened to be Yale students? or as Yale students who happened to be black?

Read the essay here:
http://www.faculty.umb.edu/lawrence_blum/courses/232_12/readings/carter_black.pdf.

Race-Holding
from *The Content on Our Character*

SHELBY STEELE

Unlike Stephen Carter, who probed the deep reasons why he chooses to affirm his blackness out of love and kinship, Shelby Steele (b. 1946), in this second selection from his provocative 1990 book, The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America, *explores a different—and, to him, more troubling—psychological aspect of self-identifying by race, what he calls "Race-Holding." Steele claims that "race does not determine our fates as powerfully as it once did, which means that it is not the vital personal concern that it once was." For this reason, he suspects that the holding up of race is a psychological shield against "what we do not want to see in ourselves."*

*What does Steele mean by "integration shock"? What does he mean, exactly, by "race-holding," and what, according to Steele, is its psychological basis? Why does he find fault with it? At one point, he says that people "*choose *to believe in their inferiority, not to fulfill society's prophesy about them, but for the comforts and rationalizations their racial 'inferiority' affords them." What does he mean? Could he be right? What is the point of the story he tells about himself at the end? What, according to Steele, are the responsibilities of blacks, if they are to succeed in the "struggle to achieve our full humanity"? Do you find his arguments compelling? Why or why not?*

I am a fortyish, middle-class, black American male with a teaching position at a large state university in California. I have owned my own home for more than ten years, as well as the two cars that are the minimal requirement for life in California. And I will confess to a moderate strain of yuppie hedonism. Year after year my two children are the sole representatives of their race in their classrooms, a fact they sometimes have difficulty remembering. We are the only black family in our suburban neighborhood, and even this claim to specialness is diminished by the fact that my wife is white. I think we are called an "integrated" family, though no one has ever used the term with me. For me to be among large numbers of blacks requires conscientiousness and a long car ride, and in truth, I have not been very conscientious lately. Though I was raised in an all-black community just south of Chicago, I only occasionally feel nostalgia for such places. Trips to the barbershop now and then usually satisfy this need, though recently, in the interest of convenience, I've taken to letting my wife cut my hair.

I see in people's eyes from time to time, and hear often in the media, what amounts to judgment of people like myself: You have moved into the great amorphous middle class and lost your connection to your people and your cultural roots. You have become a genuine invisible man. This is a judgment with many obvious dimensions, many arrows of guilt. But, in essence, it charges me with selfishness and inauthenticity.

At one point I romanticized my situation, thought of myself as a marginal man. The seductive imagery of alienation supported me in this. But in America today racial

marginality is hard to sell as the stuff of tragedy. The position brings with it an ugly note of self-insistence that annoys people in a society that is, at least officially, desegregated.

For better or worse, I'm not very marginal. In my middle-American world I see people like myself everywhere. We nod coolly at stoplights, our eyes connect for an awkward instant in shopping malls, we hear about one another from our white friends. "Have you met the new doctor at the hospital . . . the engineer at IBM . . . the new professor in history?" The black middle class is growing. We are often said to be sneaking or slipping or creeping unnoticed into the middle class, as though images of stealth best characterized our movement. I picture a kind of underground railroad, delivering us in the dead of night from the inner city to the suburbs.

But even if we aren't very marginal, we are very shy with one another, at least until we've had a chance to meet privately and take our readings. When we first meet, we experience a trapped feeling, as if we walked into a cage of racial expectations that would rob us of our individuality by reducing us to an exclusively racial dimension. We are a threat, at first, to one another's uniqueness. I have seen the same well-dressed black woman in the supermarket for more than a year now. We do not speak, and we usually pretend not to see each other. But, when we turn a corner suddenly and find ourselves staring squarely into each other's eyes, her face freezes and she moves on. I believe she is insisting that both of us be more than black—that we interact only when we have a reason other than the mere fact of our race. Her chilliness enforces a priority I agree with—individuality over group identity.

But I believe I see something else in this woman that I also see in myself and in many other middle-class blacks. It is a kind of race fatigue, a deep weariness with things racial, which comes from the fact that our lives are more integrated than they have ever been before. Race does not determine our fates as powerfully as it once did, which means it is not the vital personal concern it once was. Before the sixties, race set the boundaries of black life. Now, especially for middle-class blacks, it is far less a factor, though we don't always like to admit it. Blacks still suffer from racism, so we must be concerned, but this need to be concerned with what is not so personally urgent makes for race fatigue.

I have a friend who did poorly in the insurance business for years. "People won't buy insurance from a black man," he always said. Two years ago another black man and a black woman joined his office. Almost immediately both did twice the business my friend was doing, with the same largely white client base.

Integration shock is essentially the shock of being suddenly accountable on strictly personal terms. It occurs in situations that disallow race as an excuse for personal shortcomings and it therefore exposes vulnerabilities that previously were hidden. One response to such shock is to face up to the self-confrontation it brings and then to act on the basis of what we learn about ourselves. After some struggle, my friend was able to do this. He completely revised his sales technique, asked himself some hard questions about his motivation, and resolved to work harder.

But when one lacks the courage to face oneself fully, a fear of hidden vulnerabilities triggers a fright-flight response to integration shock. Instead of admitting that racism has declined, we argue all the harder that it is still alive and more insidious than ever. We hold race up to shield us from what we do not want to see in ourselves. My friend did this at first, saying that the two blacks in his office were doing better than he was because they knew how to "kiss white ass." Here he was *race-holding*, using race to keep from looking at himself. . . .

Once race-holding is triggered by fear, it ensnares us in a web of self-defeating attitudes that end up circumventing the new freedoms we've won over the past several decades. I have seen its corrosive effects in my own life, and in the lives of virtually every black person I've known. Some are only mildly touched by it, while others seem incapacitated by it. But race-holding is as unavoidable as defensiveness itself, and I am convinced that it is one of the most debilitating, yet unrecognized, forces in black life today.

I define a *holding* as any self-description that serves to justify or camouflage a person's fears, weaknesses, and inadequacies. Holdings are the little and big exaggerations, distortions, and lies about ourselves that prop us up and let us move along the compromised paths we follow. They develop to defend against threats to our self-esteem, threats that make us feel vulnerable and that plant a seed of fear. This fear can work like wind on a brushfire, spreading self-doubt far beyond what the initial threat would warrant, so that we become even more weakened and more needy of holdings. Since holdings justify our reticence and cowardice, they are usually expressed in the form of high belief or earthy wisdom. A man whose business fails from his own indifference holds an image of himself as a man too honest to be a good businessman—a self-description that draws a veil over his weakness.

For some years I have noticed that I can walk into any of my classes on the first day of the semester, identify the black students, and be sadly confident that on the last day of the semester a disproportionate number of them will be at the bottom of the class, far behind any number of white students of equal or even lesser native ability. More to the point, they will have performed beneath their own native ability. Self-fulfilling prophesy theory says that their schools have always expected them to do poorly, and that they have internalized this message and *done* poorly. But this deterministic theory sees blacks only as victims, without any margin of choice. It cannot fully explain the poor performances of these black students because it identifies only the forces that *pressure* them to do poorly. By overlooking the margin of choice open to them, this theory fails to recognize the degree to which they are responsible for their own poor showing. (The irony of this oversight is that it takes the power for positive change away from the students and puts it in the hands of the very institutions that fail them in the first place.)

The theory of race-holding is based on the assumption that a margin of choice is always open to blacks (even slaves had some choice). And it tried to make clear the mechanisms by which we relinquish that choice in the name of race. With the decline in racism the margin of black choice has greatly expanded, which is probably why race-

holding is so much more visible today than ever before. But anything that prevents us from exploiting our new freedom to the fullest is now as serious a barrier to us as racism once was.

The self-fulfilling prophesy theory is no doubt correct that black students, like the ones I regularly see, internalize a message of inferiority that they receive from school and the larger society around them. But the relevant question in the 1990s is why they *choose* to internalize this view of themselves. Why do they voluntarily perceive themselves as inferior? We can talk about the weakened black family and countless other scars of oppression and poverty. And certainly these things have much to do with the image these students have of themselves. But they do not fully explain this self-image because none of them entirely eliminates the margin of choice that remains open. Choice lives in even the most blighted circumstances, and it clearly lives in the lives of these black college students.

I think they *choose* to believe in their inferiority, not to fulfill society's prophesy about them, but for the comforts and rationalizations their racial "inferiority" affords them. They hold their race to evade individual responsibility. Their margin of choice scares them, as it does all people. They are naturally intimidated by that eternal tussle between freedom to act and the responsibility we must take for our actions. To some extent all of us balk in the face of this. The difference is that these students use their race to conceal the fact that they are balking. Their "inferiority" shields them from having to see that they are afraid of an all-out competition with white students. And it isn't even an honest inferiority. I don't think they really believe it. It is a false inferiority, *chosen* over an honest and productive confrontation with white students and their real fears—a strategy that allows them to stay comfortably on the sidelines in a university environment that all but showers them with opportunity.

"I'm doing okay for a black student," a student once told me. "I'm doing well considering where I came from," I have told myself. Race allows us both to hide from the real question, which is, "Am I doing what I can, considering my talents and energies?"

I see all of this as pretty much a subconscious process, fear working on a subterranean level to let us reduce our margin of choice in the name of race. Consciously, we tell ourselves that we are only identifying with our race, but fear bloats our racial identity to an unnatural size and then uses it as cover for its subversive work. The more severe the integration shock, the more fear cover is needed. . . .

Some years ago I made a mistake at a neighbor's cocktail party that taught me something about personal responsibility. I went to the party for the thinnest of reasons—mere politeness—though the afternoon was hot and I was already in a peevish mood. The event would have been problematic even if I weren't the only black at the party. But I was, and on this afternoon I *chose* to make note of the fact, though it was hardly a new experience for me. As I strolled through the sun-baked patio, avoiding people more than engaging then, I held this fact more and more tightly until I came to believe it had a

profound meaning I needed to understand. After a while I decided that others needed to understand it, too.

In the sixties, black and white liberals often engaged in something that might be called the harangue-flagellation ritual. Blacks felt anger, white liberals felt guilt, and when they came together, blacks would vent their anger by haranguing the whites, who often allowed themselves to be scourged as a kind of penance. The "official" black purpose of this rite was to "educate" whites on the issue of race, and in the sixties this purpose may sometimes have been served. But in the eighties, after a marked decline in racism and two decades of consciousness-raising, the rite had become both anachronistic and, I think, irresponsible. Nevertheless, it suited my mood on this hot afternoon, so I retrieved it from its dusty bin and tried to make it fashionable again.

A woman at the party said how much she liked Jesse Jackson's rhetorical style. Was "style" the only thing she liked? I asked, with an edge to my voice. The woman gave me a curious and exasperated look, but I pushed on anyway. Soon I was lecturing six or seven people around me: I told them that racism had been driven underground in the sixties and seventies, where more insidious strategies for foiling the possibilities of black people had evolved. I pointed to the black unemployment rate, the continued segregation of many schools, housing discrimination, and so on. Soon I saw that the old harangue-flagellation ritual was firmly back in place. I was shaming these people, and they nodded at what I said in a way that gratified me.

But at home that night I felt a stinging shame, and even weeks later the thought of that afternoon made me cringe. Eventually I saw why. For one thing, I was trading on my race with those people, using the very thing I claimed to be so concerned with to buy my way out of certain anxieties. . . . I was race-holding in response to the integration shock I felt in this integrated situation. I had begun to feel vulnerable, and I hit those people with race before they could hit me with it. . . . . On some level I doubted myself in relation to these whites, and my insecurities drove me into an offense that was really a defense. The shame I began to feel, though I could not identify it at the time, was essentially the shame of cowardice. I felt as though I'd run away from something and used race to cover my tracks.

This shame had another dimension that was even more humiliating than the cowardice I felt. On the patio I was complaining to white people, beseeching them to see how badly blacks were still treated, and I was gratified to see their heads nod as though they understood. My voice contained no audible whine, but at least some of what I said amounted to a whine. And this is what put the sting in my shame. Cowardice was a common enough fault, but whining was quite another thing.

The race-holder whines, or complains indiscriminately, not because he seeks redress but because he seeks the status of a victim, a status that excuses him from what he fears. A victim is not responsible for his condition, and by claiming a victim's status the race-holder gives up the sense of personal responsibility he needs to better his condition. His unseen purpose is to hide rather than fight, so the anger and, more importantly, the energy

that real racism breeds in him is squandered in self-serving complaint. The price he pays for the false comfort his victim's status is a kind of impotence.

The difference between the race-holder who merely complains and the honest protestor is that the latter keeps the responsibility for his condition in his own hands. The honest protestor may be victimized, but he is not solely a victim. He thinks of himself as fully human and asks only that the rules of the game be made fair. Through fairness, rather than entitlement, he retains his personal responsibility whether or not society is fair. His purpose is to realize himself, to live the fullest possible life, and he is responsible for this, like all men, regardless of how society treats him.

Personal responsibility is the brick and mortar of power. The responsible person knows that the quality of his life is something that he will have to make inside the limits of his fate. Some of these limits he can push back, some he cannot, but in any case the quality of his life will pretty much reflect the quality of his efforts. When this link between well-being and action is truly accepted, the result is power. With this understanding and the knowledge that he is responsible, a person can see his margin of choice. He can choose and act, and choose and act again, without illusion. He can create himself and make himself felt in the world. Such a person has power.

I was neither responsible nor powerful as I stood on my neighbor's patio complaining about racism to these polite people. In effect I was asking them to be fully responsible for something blacks and whites *share* responsibility for. Whites must guarantee a free and fair society. But blacks must be responsible for actualizing their own lives. If I had said this to the people at the party, maybe they would have gone away with a clearer sense of their own responsibilities. But I never considered it because the real goal of my complaining was to disguise a fear I didn't want to acknowledge.

The barriers to black progress in America today are clearly as much psychological as they are social or economic. We have suffered as much as any group in human history, and if this suffering has ennobled us, it has also wounded us and pushed us into defensive strategies that are often self-defeating. But we haven't fully admitted this to ourselves. The psychological realm is murky, frightening, and just plain embarrassing. And a risk is involved in exploring it: the risk of discovering the ways in which we contribute to, if not create, the reality in which we live. Denial, avoidance, and repression intervene to save us from this risk. But, of course, they only energize what is repressed with more and more negative power, so that we are victimized as much by our own buried fears as by racism.

In the deepest sense, the long struggle of blacks in America has always been a struggle to retrieve our full humanity. But now the reactive stance we adopted to defend ourselves against oppression binds us to the same racial views that oppressed us in the first place. Snakelike, our defense has turned on us. I think it is now the last barrier to the kind of self-possession that will give us our full humanity, and we must overcome it ourselves.

About the Cover

James Karales
Selma-to-Montgomery March for Voting Rights in 1965
Estate of James Karales

James Karales was born on July 15, 1930, in Canton, Ohio, to Greek immigrants. In 1955, after earning his degree in Fine Arts from Ohio University, he came to New York and worked as an assistant to the renowned photographer W. Eugene Smith. He became a staff photographer at *Look* magazine in 1960, and for the next 11 years traveled the world as a photojournalist.

In March 1965, Karales recorded the Selma-to-Montgomery March, in which scores of protesters walked the 54 miles to the Alabama state capitol building to protest against racial injustice—and, particularly, the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson, an African American protester who was killed by an Alabama state trooper during a protest in February. The first attempt at the march, on Sunday, March 7, ended when the protesters crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge outside Selma and were confronted by Alabama state troopers. The troopers attempted to disband the protest, and in doing so left many marchers bloodied and injured, with 17 protesters requiring hospitalization.

After "Bloody Sunday," as the incident came to be called, Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders began to organize another march, to be held two days later, on Tuesday, March 9. King led about 2,500 supporters across the Pettus Bridge, where he held a short prayer session and turned the marchers around, in compliance with a federal restraining order that prohibited the march until hearings could be held. That evening, three white ministers who participated in the march were attacked, and one of them—James Reeb, who had traveled from Boston to participate—died two days later from his injuries.

On March 16, the federal judge lifted the restraining order and allowed the march to continue under the protection of the First Amendment. The march to Montgomery finally commenced on March 21, with about 3,000 protesters joining in for the first day's journey; by the time the protest reached the Alabama capitol four days later, the crowd had swelled to roughly 25,000 people. At the capitol, King delivered a speech in which he encouraged the protesters that it would not be long before they would see justice: "I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because 'truth crushed to earth will rise again.' . . . How long? Not long, because: 'Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.'"[61]

Karales's iconic picture captures a dramatic view of the marchers that emphasizes their historic undertaking. The four figures in front march in unison, leading a seemingly un-ending line of protesters who rally around the American flag to protest in favor of the Constitution's guaranteed freedoms. The dark clouds above remind us of the difficult obstacles that stand in the protesters' way and the courage required to continue. In addition, the photograph is framed so that only the essentials—the protesters, the flag, and the sky—are present, isolating them from the milieu of national guardsmen, reporters, and cameramen also present. As historian Taylor Branch, author of *America in the King Years*, notes, the photograph "may very well be the seminal image to come out of the civil rights marches in the South. . . . It is an amazing combination of movement and shadow. It looks like they are marching out of the Red Sea."[62]

After covering the Selma-to-Montgomery March, Karales continued his career in photojournalism, alternating between covering the Civil Rights Movement and the war in Vietnam for the next several years. He died in 2002 at the age of 71.

Looking carefully at the appearance of the marchers at various parts of the picture, describe the overall visual effect of the progression from right to left. What is the mood of the marchers? What feelings does the picture arouse in you? Is envy one of them? Can you imagine what it must have been like to have been in that march?

[61] Martin Luther King Jr., "Our God Is Marching On!," March 25, 1965, http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/kingpapers/article/our_god_is_marching_on/.
[62] Jon Thurber, Obituary for James Karales, *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 2002, http://articles.latimes.com/2002/apr/08/local/me-karales8.

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